

STARBURST

SPECIAL ISSUE!

COMIC HEROES ON SCREEN

WE LOOK AT A NEW CINEMA AND TV TREND

THONGOR THE BARBARIAN

THE BIRTH OF A SWORD AND SORCERY MOVIE

STAR WARS SPECIAL EFFECTS

WE TALK TO OSCAR-WINNING MOVIE MAGICIAN BRIAN JOHNSON

ROALD DAHL SPEAKS!

INTERVIEW WITH TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED AUTHOR

WALT DISNEY'S FANTASIA

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT A FANTASY CLASSIC





THONGOR THE BARBARIAN

WE TAKE AN ADVANCE
LOOK AT A NEW
BARBARIAN MOVIE IN ITS
EARLY PLANNING STAGES
AND TALK TO PRODUCER
MILTON SUBOTSKY AND
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COMIC HEROES ON SCREEN

STARBURST REPORTS ON A
NEW SCREEN TREND IN
FANTASY CINEMA AND TV,
THE RISE OF THE COMIC
HERO. SEE PAGE 24.



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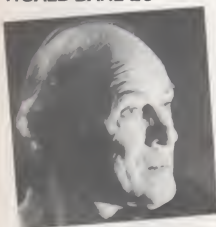


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STARBURST LETTERS

WHITHER BLAKE'S 7?

Starburst is the only worthwhile fantasy magazine in existence. Don't change a thing (except perhaps an occasional story or two). The point of this letter is that I have something to say and this was the best place to say it.

Blake's 7 is indisputably the best tv series since Doctor Who. I agree with Paul Darrow that the latest run was the best yet in that the storylines were mostly superb and the characters were all well-handled (except Dayna, who looks slightly artificial, almost an alternative development of Cally). But I have one major complaint.

At the end of the second

series there was no logical reason for the characters to stay together. Without Blake, the crew have no desire to overthrow The Federation and for the third series the Liberator seemed to house a group of interstellar tourists. Villa had a perfect opportunity to flee and didn't. I can accept that Avon stayed to try and seize the ship for himself but now, with the Liberator destroyed, even that reason is gone.

For the forthcoming season I would expect some drastic changes. Surely they can't just find another supership and start all over again. Avon in particular has no reason to stay with the rest. I don't know how the producers will develop this but the show will lose all credibility

if the crew becomes one big happy family.

Keep up the good work.

T. Lee,
Dundee.

BLAKE AWARDS

I read all the articles in Starburst. There's a saying "money can't buy everything". And Blake's 7 proves it. One of the lowest budgeted tv series managed to produce to Starburst Awards last year. And richly deserved too.

Were the Starburst Awards televised last year? And will you be printing the results of this

year's Awards?

An Australian Reader,
Australia.

We regret to say that the Starburst Awards were not televised last year though we are open to offers this year! The Awards will be presented at the Marvel Comics Film and Fantasy Convention over the weekend of 18th and 19th October 1980 at the Royal Horticultural New Hall, Vincent Square, London SW1. Naturally we will be printing the results in the first available issue of Starburst - probably issue 28.

Below: A selection of scenes from Blake's 7 a series so successful that although originally the BBC were not planning to continue, they have now reconsidered and are at this very moment planning a fourth series.



WICKER MEN

With reference to the item on the 1973 British Lion film *The Wicker Man* (*Things to Come*, Starburst 23) as having at long last the green light for screening, some of the fans of this classic have already organised themselves to form the Wicker Men Appreciation Society.

We have already issued two editions of our journal (*Summerise News*) and at the time of writing, issue number three is being prepared. Our membership is still small but

we have members on both sides of the Atlantic.

Turning to the film itself, only the shorter 86 minute version has ever been shown in Europe (both on tv and on the big screen). Abrexus Films, in the States, have managed to reconstitute a longer 102 minute version and we of the WMAAS especially look forward to seeing this over here. Remembering the film's original UK screening (when it was tagged onto Roeg's *Don't Look Now* without any prepublicity or announcement), Perhaps this time it will be accepted for the classic it surely is. And this is so without the

over-publicised scenes with Britt Ekland (which only take up a short part of the film) since the central theme is the clash between Lord Summerisle (Chris Lee) and Sgt Howie (Edward Woodward).

David J. Lally (WMAAS),
75e Richboma Terrace,
London SW8

We've deliberately given David's full address so that any of our readers interested in the Wicker Men Appreciation Society can contact the club directly. And don't forget to include a stamped addressed envelope when writing as frequently fan clubs have very limited funds.



SUPERMAG!

SUPERMAG! I would like to compliment you on the new lay out of *Starburst* and congratulate you on the rapidly rising quality of your publication.

The quality of the reviews and other features in your magazine set it above the sf media magazine. John Brosnan's reviews are usually the highlight in any month's issue and that's quite a compliment considering the quality of all your writers' articles.

Mr Brosnan's reviews are the best I have come across in any publication and make a refreshing change from the patronising garbage churned out by many other science fiction magazines.

The review of *Star Trek the Motion Picture* by Mr. Brosnan was the most intelligent review of this film I have read. Most of the *Star Trek* fans I know went to see the film out of loyalty and were disappointed with the over-long, special-effects-dominated



rehashed tv episode they were greeted with.

I have only two gripes about this mag: the lack of colour and the shortage of articles by Alan Murdoch. By the way I think his review of *The Empire Strikes Back* should have appeared in *Starburst* rather than in *Star Wars Weekly* (issue 122). It was,

although I hate to admit it, in my humble opinion, better than Mr Brosnan's (I liked Yoda and the emphasis on the Force).

In fact I would argue with Mr. Brosnan in that I think *Empire* was a self-contained story, revolving around Luke's training to become a Jedi and a master of The Force. It involved Luke

Skywalker's battle against the Dark Force, shown twice in the film. Once when he entered the tree cave and lost, and the second time when he chose death rather than become an agent of the Dark Side, in effect winning.

Paul A. Leeds.

NATION'S SURVIVORS



Having just received your issue number 24 I felt that I had to reply to the letter from Stephen Woodward. In it he criticises *Blake's 7* and *Doctor Who* and a handful of others before going on to say that it is a great pity Great Britain has never produced a truly

great science fiction series. . . "in the mould of those marvellous Quatermass episodes of old." Obviously Stephen has never seen *Survivors*.

If there was ever a series of outstanding brilliance which received little or no credit, it was

Survivors. Terry Nation wrote some of his best scripts for the show. Viewed over the three series, the programme is frighteningly accurate in its portrayal of the total decline of civilisation after a decimating global plague, and eventually its partial rebuilding by a small group of determined men and women.

Survivors has been off the small screen for a couple of years now but I have seen nothing to compare with it (despite the fact that I am an ardent *Star Trek* and *Gerry Anderson* fan). Surely *Starburst* could find a small corner in some later issue for a reprise of *Survivors*?

May I wish you continued success in the publication of Britain's Number One Science Fiction Magazine!

Sue Turner,
Southsea.

You're right of course, Susan. Survivors was a superior, adult oriented science fiction show. We'll try to find "a small corner in the earliest available issue of Starburst How's that?

John Brosnan has promised that he will be replying to his many critics in the very next issue of Starburst, when he begins writing a regular film column for the magazine.

Send all comments to:
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THINGS TO COME

SUPERDONNER

"Superman destroyed me." Thus spoke Richard Donner on one chapter of his movie career he doesn't like to discuss very much. That's all he'll say. The superfilm — and its accompanying supertrouble with the Salkinds — did not, however, destroy Donner's financial standing. He paid for his next (9-million dollar) film, himself. Called *Inside Moves*, it stars Daer Hunter John Savage, a newcomer Amy Wright (from Huston's *Wise Blood*), and an Oscar-winner not seen since his 1946 movie, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Harold Russell. If you've ever seen this William Wyler classic you'd hardly need reminding that Russell was the guy back from the wars (for real) with hooks for hands. Donner initially found this story "of wounded people and dreams", a trifle depressing after he shot *The Omen*. By the time Clark Kent had flown in — and out — of his life, he saw the script in a different way and is delighted with the result. I doubt if he will pay for his next film, however — *High Time* is budgeted at 12-million dollars. And then? "And then," says Donner, "my dream is a comedy . . . with Merlon Brando." Another one?

HURRY CAINE

Of all actors, Michael Caine, is suddenly looming large (very large with that Hollywood waistline) as the most regular exponent of fantasy chills. It's probably all part of his campaign to erase *Beyond the Poseidon Adventure* from his (and our) memory. The new, terrified face of Caine begins Michael

Ritchie's film of Peter Benchley's latest book, *The Island*, upon which there's many a scare between dune and tide, let me tell you. Next stop: his Brian De Palma debut, *Dressed to Kill*, with Angie Dickinson playing Janet Leigh in the Psycho shower. Ceine's a psychologist in this one but that, I'm sure, does not detract from the usual De Palmian terror. (And that's what's wrong with the film, according to Stateside critics. It is just the usual De Palmian terror!) Now, Mike is completing *The Hand* for producer Edward Pressman. He plays a cartoonist losing his career when his right hand is amputated after a traffic accident. He takes up a post as a college teacher in a small campus town, where, in the words of the omnipresent hype, "all sorts of strange things start to happen". Like Ceine acting again, for once . . . ?

VIDEO TREK

The next sound you'll hear is America's Trekkies rushing to buy RCA's Selectavision video-disc equipment. They're a little early as the "vidisk" answer to the video-cassette does not come onto the US market until 1981. But when it does, it will feature ten Star Trek TV episodes among its programmes. If these shows sell well — and who says they won't? Any one of them is better than the dullard movie — RCA have an option to buy the remaining 68 episodes from Paramount.

This is the first time, to my limited knowledge at least, that any TV series has been made available to play on any of the burgeoning products in home-video toys. Selectavision is also heavily into movies on disc as



well, of course — 500 at last count.

The new disc system — yes, it's rather like putting an album on your stereo at home, except your hardware has a screen attached to it — has much in its favour. I've seen them work and the picture quality is certainly on a par with tape. The disc lasts longer; virtually indestructible. Furthermore, it's much easier to carry home from the shops, post to a friend — or indeed send off to any 16mm film society. It's quite possible that, by the end of the '80s, or whenever the video biz has settled down to normality, that it is the disc that will emerge triumphant and bury tape forever. Unless, of course, by then, the Japanese have come along with something completely different. Or if not the Japanese, maybe Spock will . . .

ENTER: MARVEL PRODUCTIONS

Just this once, we make the big news ourselves. Well, not quite Editor McKenzie and the lads but Marvel Comics, Inc. We're going into the movies! Into production for ourselves . . . via our combine's new offices in Sherman Oaks. Stan Lee, but of course, will be creative director of the new Marvel Productions Ltd, and the company president is David DePatie — the DePatie of DePatie-Freleng Enterprises, the top Hollywood animation combine, which I reported recently, has quit business after 17 helcyon years.

So it goes without my saying, that much of the new Marvel movie product will be in the animation area, both for kid-vision and the cinemas. Debut production, in fact, is a co-operative venture with Japan's leading animation experts, Toie — a 90-minute cartoon based on Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

If that doesn't sound exactly Marvel-ious, don't fret. There's more on the stocks, including a 60-minute cartoon series of Spider-Man. "Marvel was unhappy with the live-



action tv-pilot of Spider-Man," comments DePatie. "That's another reason for Marvel to get into production — to retain some creative control."

DePatie is joined on the new Marvel wing's board by Lee Gunther, as vice-president in charge of production — his old job at DePatie-Freleng. And between them they're retaining some of their old work and contacts. They did most of the Pink Panther film credit-titles, of course . . . and have been signed up by the same director, Blake Edwards, to design the titles of his new Hollywood comedy, *S.O.B.* They're also developing a movie, comprising live-action and animation from the book, *The Last of the Really Great Whang Doodles*, written by Mrs Edwards, Julie Andrews.

Although they've not started it as yet, I think we can expect live or animated films or tv-pilots to be made soon enough on all the other unfilmed Marvel superheroes. That could keep them busy for the next few years, wouldn't you say?

Back in harness after his trip to the Cannes Film Festival, roving *Starburst* reporter Tony Crawley turns his attention once more to news of fantasy around the world.

STAGE TREK

Spock himself, Leonard Nimoy, has been back on the road with his one-man show, *Vincent*. No, nothing to do with *The Black Hole* robot — it's Nimoy's tribute — written, performed produced and directed by him — to the life and times of the painter, Vincent Van Gogh. Nimoy first took the show around the States last year after shooting the *Star Trek* movie. The demand was so great, he had to begin another Stateside stage trek into larger theatres. Now I hear, he is investigating the possibility of bringing the show to London and Europe in the winter. Why anyone wants to come here in the winter, I can't imagine.

OMEN 3



Richard Donner, the original *Omen* director, is billed as executive producer of *Omen 3 — The Final Conflict*. "I gave them a lot of help with the script," says he. "I just hope they've cut out a lot of the religious stuff." Hah!

GENIE-OUS

Canada has its own Oscars called Genies presented by the Academy of Canadian Cinema. This year, one film cleared the board, winning eight of its nine nominations. The film is our Peter Medak's real chiller, *The Changeling*, the ultimate in old dark (and haunted) houses.

Genies, however are more chauvinistic than the Oscars or our British awards (which used to be nick-named Stellas). In Toronto, you have to be Canadian to win a Genie at all — except in the special sections reserved for alien actors. So while, *The Changeling* picked up Best Film, camera, editing, adapted script, sound, art direction and foreign acting awards (for George C. Scott and his wife, Trish Van Devere), the poor director, Peter Medak, didn't rate a mention.

Murder by Decree was a good second-best with five wins. But that one wasn't nominated

for Best Film, as it was more British-financed than Canadian. However, director Bob Clerk won for his work, Genevieve Bujold got the Best Supporting Actress nod, and Best Canadian Actor was Christopher Plummer as the screen's 19th Sherlock Holmes.

TITLE SWITCH



Klaus Kinski's Hollywood movie — mentioned here in my Cannes festival reports in *Starburst* 24 — has undergone a title change. For the second time, the murder — Klaus' 99th film — chiller began life as *Moulded to Murder*. It was swiftly re-named *Murder by Mail* in time for repeated Cannes screenings, and is now ready for business, Stateside, as simply *Schizoid*. The director remains the same: David Paulsen. He based the film on the real-life would-be-killer who solicited a Chicago newspaper reporters aid through his column to help him not to kill people...! Paulsen, who started his association with the Cannon Group couple, Manheim

Golan and Yoram Globus, by writing lyrics for their musical, *Kazablan*, and then wound up writing the full script, next he wrote their *Diamonds and The Uranium Conspiracy* — and last year the Cannon-ites gave him his director's spurs with *Killer Behind the Mask*. They shouldn't have bothered!

MORE RIPS

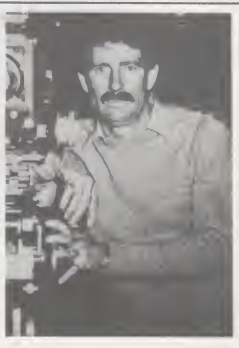
The rip-offs of John Carpenter's cheap budget success with *Halloween* continue apace. We've had America's surprise sleeper of the year already — *Seen Cunningham's Friday the 13th*. (Don't know about you, but I didn't think very much of it). Next in line: Max Kalmanowicz's *The Children*... Robert Hammer's *Don't Answer the Phone*... Fred Walton's *When A Stranger Calls*... MGM are very high on *He Knows You're Alone*, directed by someone calling himself (quite rightly for all I know) Armand Mastroianni. But best of the bunch, for my money, is ex-Corman man Joe Dante's *The Howling*, from Carpenter's new home, Avco-Embassy. This one features ex-Avenger Patrick McNee in the cast, alongside John Carradine. Plus music from Pino Donaggio, responsible for the score of Nic Roeg's *Don't Look Now*.

FANTASY LAND

Taking a leaf out of Coppola and George Lucas' San Francisco book, the Saul Zaentz Company — maker of *The Lord of the Rings* — has opened its own film centre in Barkely. Seven storeys high and costing 11-million dollars, the complex is a film-maker's dream. The toys include a 42-channel sound-mixing facility for

DISNEYAIRES

Animators may be leaving in droves, but no wonder the top folk stay on at the Disney studio in Hollywood. They're making a mint from an old idea of Walt's. Seventeen years ago, he decided to keep hold of his upper-echelon people by letting them invest in the Disney movies. Or at least, the live-action movies. Never, apparently, the cartoons. Three of the first five investors have either died or retired, leaving the studio's daring duo of president Card Walker and production chief Ron Miller. They both made 1,200,000 dollars from their investments last year. In fact since 1963, they've pulled in around nine million each from investments of about four million. That's one reason why you never hear Ron Miller moaning about his fairly paltry Disney salary of just 136,152 dollars. Over the years, various Disney film directors have joined the scheme and *The Black Hole*'s Gary Nelson will be the latest to benefit. As a talent incentive scheme it's fairly unique in Hollywood studios. Most of the investors borrowed heavily from their banks to start them off and had a few bleak years until Mary Poppins came along bringing cash in the hand and smiles from the bank managers.



THINGS TO COME

Dolby, stereo and Sansurround; a screening-room equipped with Magna-Tech high-speed projectors; six editing suites; and an electronic looping facility. When Zentz isn't using any of the floors for his own movies — such as his *Rings* sequel, now in the works — he naturally hires them out to independent companies. With Coppola, Lucas and now Zentz, there appears to be more high-film-tech available in the San Francisco region than in Hollywood itself.

I suppose Ridley Scott would be doing the same in London . . . if he received any of his percentage of the *Alien* profits, which he hasn't yet. Apparently there aren't any . . .

GREAT SCOTT!

Yes, I think I'll repeat that. *Alien*, which has grossed around 100-million dollars around the world's box-offices, represents only half that much in profit for 20th Century-Fox, according to Hollywood reports. Or even less. Whatever the accountancy computation, neither Ridley Scott, Dan O'Bannon or any of the other people with profit-cuts have yet seen any money in their morning mail. Seems it's all been dribbled away in publicity, advertising and stuff like that. A terrific storm is brewing in Film City over this case. This is not, I'm sure, the last you'll hear of it in this column. Makes the *Superman* scandal look like peanuts . . .

Ridley, by the way, is in Hollywood reading his new movie, *Blade Runner*, upon which he's again taking the chance of a low salary and participation in the profits. If any. *Blade Runner* will have a similar ominous feel to *Alien* says Scott. What he's calling "a heavy metal look", based on the artwork of Edward Hopper. Quite a few special-effects planned as well. The film incidentally is the one last referred to on these pages as *Dangerous Days*.

SSHH!

Hollywood's Studio Six Productions is keeping so secretive about its project, *Argo*, I don't even know who Studio Six Productions are . . . But their movie is shooting around Asia and then Europe. When they want to lift the veil of secrecy, I'll have more for you . . .

NEW FACES

Could be a whole bunch of brand new faces among the guest-star brigade in American TV series soon. And about time too. The ABC network has held a series of auditions in New York — seeing 200 actors a day for two weeks — in the hope of finding about a hundred fresh actors for cameo and indeed, star roles. ABC-TV are concerned with such box-fodder as *Charlie's Angels*, *Fantasy Island*, *Happy Days*, *Hart to Hart*, *Levana* and *Shirley*, *Mork* and *Mindy*, *Soap*, *Taxi* and the revamped (and short-lived) *Galactica 1980*. Why did they go talent hunting in the Big Apple? Because, so they said, they'd seen all the talent on the West Coast. Haven't we all?

SUPERCHRIS

Good news for Hollywood. MGM are really back in the film production business. The venerable old outfit has just announced a total of 38 films to be shot within the next two years. Top of the heap — shooting starts in November — is Christopher Reeve's first movie since *Superman II*. A caper film about computers, it's called *Trapdoor*, and will be the first American movie of the top-notch German *wunderkind* director, Wim Wenders.

Also in Leo The Lion's new roaring package, a feature film debut of MGM-TV star Erik Estrada from CHiPs. He's due to follow Warner Bexter, Cesar Romero and Duncan Renaldo into the fourth re-make of O. Henry's Latin rogue, *The Cisco Kid*. I must admit, Estrada does the teeth for it . . .



Above: Perhaps the best Superman of all—Christopher Reeve.

HAIRY

One of the Jews scriptwriters, Carl Gottlieb (Spielberg also gave him a welk-on, well, sit-in, role as well; you may recall), has completed his first movie as a director: *Caveman*. It's a Pythonesque comedy about prehistoric times, which sounds more like *The Flintstones* brought to life. Carl also wrote the (original) script with one of Mel Brooks's scribes, Rudy De Luca, and the result stars the most unlikely on (and off) screen lovers of the year: Ringo Starr and ex-Bond girl, Barbara Bach.

THE OTHER SEAN C.

How do you follow Friday the 13th . . . ? That's director Sean Cunningham's problem. And he's rather enjoying it. His *el cheapo* horror film has already earned in excess of 31-million dollars, and suddenly Mr C is rather hot in Hollywood circles. Paramount are chasing him — even the people from the Disney studio. While counting his surprise loot, Sean is undecided between two scripts for his next movie: *A Stranger in Watching* or *The Witness* (from the Friday writer Earl MacReuch). The real problem is that he's not too sure about going down the same terror route again. "If I look into myself, there's a lack of growth if I do that." True!

OBITUARY

Having just made it big at age 58, with his book and of course the movie version of it, *The Amityville Horror* writer Jay Anson died following a heart attack in Palo Alto, California. A former journalist, who began his career (as most real professionals did) as a copy boy, Anson became a film and tv scenarist after his period in the forces. *Amityville* was his first book, and proved a runaway success in the best-selling book and film charts. His second book, *666* — said to be based on similar real-life supernatural happenings — was bought by the new Orion Pictures in galley-form; it's due to be published in America in the autumn.

Tonto has also died — Jay Silverheels, 67, the Mohawk Indian actor who cheered up all our Saturday-morning picture days alongside Lone Ranger Clayton Moore. They made a couple of movies together and 300 tv shows over eight years from 1949. Jay was shooting *Broken Arrow* with Jimmy Stewart when he learned he'd landed the Tonto role, his other movies included the Duke's *True Grit* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* with Burt Reynolds. Jay founded the Indian Actors' Workshop in Hollywood in the sixties and later worked in community service, aiding drug addicts and the elderly, until his stroke nearly six years ago. He died of pneumonia complications . . . less than a year after being the first North American Indian to be awarded a star in Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame pavement.

THINGS TO COME



NAZI FICTION

Len Deighton's scary book, SS-GB, which looked at British life if the Nazis had won the war and ruled from Buck House, is finally a movie. Made in Canada -- where else? James Mason heads a respectable cast, also featuring Ralph Richardson and Dracula's lovely Kate Nelligan. I'd be rather more enthusiastic if the film's director Peter Carter had a track record; even more so if the whole enterprise were not being mounted by Herry Allen Towers. He had a 10-million-dollar budget and a script from Michael Winner writer, Gerald Wilson. But who can trust Towers after what he did to *The Shape of Things to Come*...

MORE AMITYVILLE

American International is so delighted with the money *The Amityville Horror* brought in, the studio is rushing into a prequel... Murder in Amityville. This will be based on Hans Holzer's book, *Murder*, which told the story of the five deaths which took place in the house that later scared the Lutes into making the odd million from staying there for all of 28 hairy days... Any sequel is impossible, for the people living in the Amityville today swear nothing is wrong. No ghosts, no noises, no blood, no mud, no thuds. Or perhaps, as compared with the Lutes... no imagination!

STRIP CAPERS

Thank you, Starburst Andrew J. Sumner, of Formby on Merseyside, for the news that the BBC have indeed purchased 24 episodes of Filmation's *New Flash Gordon* cartoon series. Andrew was intrigued by my news of the series and wrote to the Beeb for more information. They told him all, and suggested he watch *Radio Times* for screening information. I'll have to do much the same. I ring the Beeb just now. Took four calls to get the right department (as usual), and then the lady in question was out (as usual). I think I'll follow Andrew's lead in future--and write. The BBC have no idea about how to utilise telephones.

I should add here, that Andrew Sumner is the very first reader to supply me with news for my column. He also tells me that the Ruby and Spears animation studios in LA are adapting more of DC's "shape-shifting supersleuth" for *The Plastic Man Comedy-Adventure Show*... that Henne-Barbers are onto their third series of DC characters in *The World's Greatest Super Friends*... and that a new animated version of Marvel's *Spider-Woman* is in the works over there as well. That one, I did know about!



SPIELBERG PLANS

Soon as he's finished his brace of movies for George Lucas -- he's well into *Raiders of the Lost Ark* at Elstree with Harrison Ford -- Steven Spielberg will go to work for MGM. His deal there begins with his first re-make -- *A Guy Named Joe*, based but, as Metro say, "not wholly derivative" of the 1943 MGM war film, starring Spencer Tracy and Irene Dunne.

TV FLASH



He wasn't seen for long -- and never said a word -- as Bo Derek's husband in *10*. But we should get a chance to see the screen's new Flash Gordon in a tv-movie soon. Sam J. Jones is the star of *Stunts Unlimited* -- which is also the name of the top Hollywood stunt group, led by stunter-turned-director Hal Needham. No one's complaining about the name being pinched, though, as Hal made the Paramount movie for the ABC network, with all his stunticians in it. It's rather like a re-working of *Mission Impossible* -- and may yet become a tv series. Glenn Corbett is the spy-type recruiting three stunt persons for the inevitable dangerous assignment. His trio: Chip Meyer, Susanne Delton and young Flash, himself, Sam Jones. Stunts win the day but of course, and naturally, they weren't carried out by our earnest young trio but by Hal's lads and ladies from the real *Stunts Unlimited*.

If the movie wins series recognition, Paramount will have to do without Sam Jones in it, or Hal Needham directing. Sam will be touring the world promoting *Flash Gordon* and Hal is already back in harness with two Burt Reynolds movies in a row, *Smokey* and the *Bandit* Have a *Baby* and *The Cannonball Run*.

HARKEN TO HAMILL

Merk Hamill is probably not the only American guy in movies to be a regular reader of *Starburst*. I mean, just look here... Only the other issue, Merk was telling John Brosnan about pulling George Lucas' leg on the set of *Star Wars* by suddenly singing new words, *Dienogoo* included, to the tune, "*Chatenogoo Choo-Choo*"... remember? I certainly did. Because within days, I heard that producer Phil Borack announced his new film will be... *Chatenogoo Choo-Choo*. Now is that coincidence? Or is that coincidence? (Actually I think Merk's version would make a better film: *Pardon me, George, could this be Dianogo poo-poo?*)



WEREWOLF

Starburst takes a look at a new horror film from independent film producer Earl Owensby, courtesy of Bobby Dupea.

They call him the C.B. DeMille of North Carolina. He has a Mickey Mouse phone on his desk, and all the gall of Donald Duck. He saw John Wayne die on *The Sands of Iwo Jima* six times as a kid and went back to *Guadalcanal* a dozen times. That decided him. He had to be a marine — and then make movies. His country welcomed him into uniform. Once demobbed, Hollywood didn't give a hoot about the good ole boy from down South.

"But I don't take no for an answer," says Earl Owensby. "I don't like to be told: You can't. Never have. Never will."

He went back home to the rolling hills of Shelby in Carolina and used his salesman's mouth to make himself a fortune. He dabbled in pneumatic equipment, furniture and one idea that didn't quite work out — pollution-free pedal-cars. He did okay, though. He's a self-made millionaire... five times over.

By 1973, a year after flirting with local politics, he made his first movie. Today, he has his own E.O. Productions churning out programmers on his own E.O. Motion Picture Park, on 44 of Shelby's choicest acres. Room aplenty, Korda-style for his own studio complex of sound-stages, editing-suites, administrative offices, a back lot, a private, 16-room motel to house his actors and crew — and a corporate air strip to fly them in and out. Plus a 1.6 million dollars recording studio under way.

Everything you see, says Owensby, is bought and paid for. Including his 7,200 sq-foot home for his wife and five children, with a cinema in the basement, and a pool up top.

He has now made and released his first dozen movies. Hollywood knows who he is today. "Oh yeah, they're lovin' me to death now, ain't they?"

If the British don't know him, it's just a matter of time. America today, tomorrow the world. Well, he's already selling his movies to 28 countries, and tomorrow it's Europe.

So what's he made, this good ole boy up to his redneck in greenstuff? Some-

thing between the old AIP and Roger Corman exploitation genre grind. From copy-cat James Bond to auto-rodeo actioners. And of course, his lycanthropy trip...

"Nothing deep 'n' heavy," he says. "I make movies for grassroots America. The Walking Tall and Billy Jack crowd. They're never gonna play Radio City Music Hall but that's okay with me. I can't afford to make artsy-craftsy movies for me to look at in my basement."

His heroes are not unlike himself, up from the bottom guys making a helluva living. He makes no bones of the fact that he was born illegitimate, one of three children his mother bore from three fathers. He was raised by a childless couple. His own mother killed herself and his true father, so he says, died hauling moonshine down a Tennessee mountain-side.

The heroes sound like him, as well. He takes the star role in most of his films. "I had no intention of becoming a movie actor. But when I called up Hollywood for actors, I was put on and put down. Agents asked for 500,000 dollars for actors who gladly would have worked for 50,000 dollars. If anyone was going to be paid 500,000 dollars, I figured it should be me. Then, I'd plough it back into the business."

He started off with an aptly named film: *Challenge*. He recruited a bunch of local technicians used to working in tv

commercials and set them loose on mountain car-chases. He shot the chases first. "Two weeks later, when I hadn't been killed, I knew we had made a right interesting beginning."

Faced with more disinterest from distributors, he released *Challenge* himself — and grossed 8-million dollars.

The next films followed thick and fast. Some very thick. All very fast. He didn't much like his 007-number, *Brass Ring*, and sold it outright for a good profit. He preferred *Death Driver* with 87 car-crashes — beat that Roger Corman! — mostly shot by ten 16mm cameras on motorcyclists' helmets and blown up to 35mm.

Hooch was a moonshining comedy, and *Seabo* had its hero on a chain-gang, circa 1957. *The Last Game* is his only tear-jerker, based on a C&W song (which are all tear-jerkers), and *Charlotte City Limits* was a "shoot 'em up, police action thing."

His latest release has been a thinly disguised version of the Presley life-age, *Living Legend*, co-starring Presley's "best girl" at the time of his death, Ginger Alden. Early Owensby, obviously, played the title role. He almost always does.

The one he enjoyed playing the most was his Wolfman, for which he went through the classic face-changing exercise to a scary lycanthrope. The director was Worth Keeter, 22, a staffer at E.O. Productions. Hammer, it ain't, but it's been churning up even more dollars at the drive-ins and Earl was considering a Cannes festival trip to start pushing it our way for the autumn or winter.

"We help audiences forget day-to-day problems," says Earl. "Our films are designed to entertain, not preach or inform. Escapism films have grass roots appeal for the largest audiences. That's why *Jaws* succeeded and the same is true for *Star Wars*."

"Eventually, one of our movies will click, too. That's what we're aiming for. The big one. If you roll the dice enough times, the proper number is bound to come up."



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Thongor

A STAR THONGOR

IN THE VALLEY

Despite a string of successes in the fantasy field, producer Milton Subotsky seems to having trouble selling the movie moguls on the idea of a barbarian film. Phil Edwards talked to Subotsky about the problems encountered.

Back in the mid-Seventies, the creative force behind Amicus Productions, Milton Subotsky, thought it a good idea to acquire the film rights to Robert E. Howard's classic sword and sorcery hero, *Conan the Barbarian*. Subotsky, a voracious reader of fantasy fiction of every kind, saw in *Conan* a chance to make an epic fantasy adventure the like of which the cinema had never seen. Having long had a dream to create a film with an almost total absence of dialogue, Subotsky felt that *Conan* would provide such a vehicle: a film to cut across international boundaries without the aid of dubbing or sub-titles. Subotsky's *Conan* would appeal to all ages and be his dream film—a smashing adventure epic for children and pure escapist fantasy for adults.

The film was to be patterned after famed Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961). The opening sequence of Subotsky's *Conan* was to show the title character hanging from a cross, half dead. A vulture lands on his shoulder and the mighty warrior turns and bites the bird's head off! Some time later, thinking *Conan* dead his enemies take him down from the cross only to have the hero come to life and destroy them. The rest of the film was to show *Conan's* quest for the people who had engineered his grisly near-fate.

Subotsky began re-reading the Howard adventures and discovered them to be far too serious and brutal in nature. Furthermore, the character of *Conan* was much too ruthless to be the hero of a film suitable for young audiences. Without drastically changing *Conan's* character, the producer realised he would be hard put to avoid an X certificate. At the same time, Subotsky was concerned with the lack of films suitable for children and the lack of finance for such movies.



BURST PREVIEW

THONGOR

OF THE DEMONS



So rather than emasculate Howard's much-loved hero, Subotsky turned to a series of stories written by Lin Carter in the sixties, featuring a Conan-style hero, Thongor. Carter's *Thongor* novels lack the dark, epic quality of Robert E. Howard's creation, while containing much of their mentor's fantasy elements. An artistic analogy could be drawn between the two characters. If Frank Frazetta's best work mirrors Robert E. Howard, then the somewhat cleaner and more simplistic art of Boris Vallejo is Thongor. Another element of Carter's writing also attracted Subotsky—humour, something almost totally lacking in the adventures of Conan.

The darker side of Howard's hero gave way to the more happy-go-lucky, adventuresome Thongor. Subotsky acquired the film rights to Thongor in late 1976 and set to work on a screenplay, *Thongor In The Valley Of The Demons*, basing it on the novel, *The Wizard of Lemuria*.

With the enormous and surprising success of *Star Wars* in mid 1977, Subotsky knew he had a potential winner with *Thongor In The Valley Of The Demons*. Surely if children all over the world could identify so strongly with Lucas' characters, then *Thongor* could emulate that success.

With the completion of his script, Subotsky brought in two people to work on the film's pre-production. Art director Tony Pratt began, through a series of production paintings, to visualise Thongor's adventures. Pratt produced dozens of paintings, allowing Subotsky to show in a visual form, the potential of the *Thongor* project.

Subotsky also chose a director for his film—Harley Cokliss. Cokliss, born in San Diego in 1945, had made several short films and documentaries as well as working in television on such programmes as *Horizon* and *Omnibus*. He directed two Children's Film Foundation featurettes, *The Battle Of Billy's Pond* and the award winning *The Glitterball*, the latter containing a considerable amount of stop-motion animation, a process any director chosen for *Thongor* would need to be conversant with. He also directed the critically-acclaimed but little seen *That Summer*. Cokliss saw in *Thongor* a great opportunity, perhaps even a chance to become another George Lucas. With the knowledge that, apart from the Ray Harryhausen *Sinbad* films, the genre of epic sword and sorcery had not really been touched in the cinema, Cokliss set to work with Subotsky and Pratt, planning *Thongor*. The film offered the young American a chance to show his skill—big special effects scenes, monsters galore and wall-to-wall action.

So began the difficult task of selling a multi-million dollar picture. To fully understand the problems faced by Milton Subotsky, it is necessary to back-track in his career a year or two. In the old

days of the highly-successful *Amicus* films, it was Subotsky's American based partner, Max Rosenberg, who had been responsible for finding finance and arranging distribution deals. Subotsky, who had made his home in England since 1959 when he had arrived here to produce the first in a long series of horror films with Rosenberg, *City Of The Dead* (aka *Horror Hotel*), had worked on scripts, finding suitable material and actively participating in the physical production of films with art directors, editors, directors, writers and actors. The nebulous world of film-financing and deal-making was not something he was interested in or particularly cared for.

With in-house production difficulties encountered on *The Land That Time Forgot*, Subotsky decided to bow out of the *Amicus* group. Finding himself an independent producer, he discovered the difficulties of money-raising for feature films. He entered into a partnership with Andrew Donally and founded *Sword and Sorcery Productions*. The two men produced *Dominique*, a psychological thriller which died an undeserved death on the circuits a couple of years ago. With Donally, he became involved in the production of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. He saw the project manhandled by a whole string of people and go from a major theatrical release to a bowdlerized TV mini-series. Although he retains co-producer credit on the film, he had nothing to do with the Richard Matheson-

Director Harley Cokliss wanted changes in the script. From the beginning he had felt that the script lacked characterisation.

scripted farrago and to this date has been denied even a screening. He may have been lucky. From all reports, the mini-series is a disaster from almost every point of view.

The selling of *Thongor* began in earnest. In later 1977, it was offered to American-International. *Star Wars* was by this time a monstrous hit and Subotsky tried to show the head of American-International, Sam Arkoff, the possibilities of making a major fantasy film in the post-*Star Wars* age. Arkoff wasn't too happy with the script, although he could see the merchandising possibilities of such a venture. His one major concern with Subotsky's screenplay was the absence of romantic interest in the story until page 64, something unheard of for an American-International feature. Arkoff requested a rewrite of the script, something Subotsky balked at, fearing that American-International's intention was to turn his cherished *Thongor* into an R-rated epic.

Harley Cokliss, too, wanted changes in the script. From the beginning, Cokliss had felt that the script lacked depth of characterisation and saw the screenplay

as little more than a blueprint from which to work when the film went into actual production. When I spoke to Subotsky recently and asked him about this aspect of the differences between him and Cokliss, he replied, "What do you do? You can put in a lot of dialogue which some people mistake for 'characterisation' and when you come to edit the picture, you find it slows down the action and you have to cut it out again.

The thing to remember with *Thongor* is that it's an *action* picture, all action."

In 1978, Subotsky and Cokliss took the *Thongor* portfolio and script to the annual meat market at Cannes, looking for potential backers. Steven Bach thought that United Artists could be interested in such a project. United Artists provided pre-production money and, in October of 1979, Subotsky began assembling a corps of special effects



Above: "Thongor the Mighty battles with the strongest warrior in his regiment. Instead of paying their lost wagers, his officers try to kill Thongor in a six against one sword fight." Below: "Defeated by treachery, Thongor is confined to a dungeon and condemned to death. He knocks out the warder and escapes the citadel in an air boat invented by the alchemist, Oolim Phon."



technicians and lining up an art department and foam rubber lab to provide the necessary material for the many stop-motion creatures which would feature in the film. He even interested Tom Howard, one-time head of MGM special effects, to act as a special effects adviser on the film, and arranged with Harry Saltzman to use the expensive equipment and facilities Saltzman had built at Shepperton Studios for use on *The Micronauts*.

United Artists had Subotsky do a breakdown of costs. He felt he could bring in the film at around seven and a half million dollars and had arranged for a completion guarantee on the film for that amount. No small budget to be sure, but still a million miles from the megabuck movies which had been announced at the time. United Artists seemed delighted with the project, the budget, the producer, in fact everything to do with the sword and sorcery epic. At this time *The Empire Strikes Back* was in production and Subotsky managed to get Nick Allder to do the mechanical effects for *Thongor* after completing his work on *Empire*.

In the meantime, Cokliss, who had put nearly two years of his life into *Thongor*, needed work and accepted sixteen weeks of second unit work on *The Empire Strikes Back* at EMI-Elstree Studios, taking over one of the units after the sad death of John Barry. The film provided Cokliss with a great learning experience, working on a major effects-

In November 1979, it was announced in the trade paper *Screen International* that United Artists were to go ahead with *Thongor*.

orientated feature. He recently told me, "We blew up a lot of stormtroopers for *Empire*. As well, I did a lot of the blue screen work, particularly in the scenes inside the *Millennium Falcon*, as well as pick-up scenes for Irvin Kershner." He also worked on the laser sword duel between Darth Vader and Luke, which provided one of the highlights of the controversial sequel.

Following *Empire*, Cokliss went back to planning *Thongor* and brought in British fantasy artist, John Bolton. Bolton, an expert on sword and sorcery art and fiction, spent what time his busy schedule allowed working on storyboards for *Thongor* with Cokliss.

In November 1979, it was announced in the British trade paper, *Screen International*, that United Artists were to go ahead with *Thongor In The Valley Of The Demons*. Six weeks later, the project was dropped for no apparent reason.

The usually ebullient Subotsky was totally dejected the week United Artists dropped the film. When I called to see him, he was drawn and tired, more from the frustrations of having his long-cherished *Thongor* pulled out from under him than the actual studio politics



Above: "A storm blows Thongor over the dangerous jungles of Chush, where he is attacked by two giant lizard hawks." Below: "Thongor is saved by the wizard of Lemuria, a strange old man called Sharajsha."



involved. He told me, "I had been planning *Thongor* for so many years. It was my idea to make the first true sword and sorcery film, long before *Conan* went any further than an option. Now if I make *Thongor* some time in the future it's going to be called a rip-off of the *Conan* movie or some other sword and sorcery film."

The reason for United Artists' withdrawal remains a mystery. Certainly it would not seem to be the fault of Subotsky's action-packed script. After all, United Artists had accepted the film with Subotsky's script. Rather, it would seem to be something more practical. At the time that *Thongor* was going through United Artists' hands, they were produc-

ing Michael Cimino's epic western, *Heaven's Gate*. The Cimino film had run ten million dollars over budget—so the possibility that the decision on *Thongor* was merely because of a cash-flow problem within United Artists seems likely.

With the end of *Thongor*, as far as United Artists were concerned, Subotsky was in a dilemma. His bank account was sadly depleted because of the money he had put into *Thongor* over four years and he had started an expensive lawsuit against his ex-partner, Max Rosenberg in New York. He had also spent the last remaining money in *Sword and Sorcery's* bank account to pick up the company's option on six

Stephen King stories, from which writers were preparing screenplays for two films. Subotsky desperately needed a film. He dusted off a script which had been written for him by Edward and Valerie Abraham, who had supplied the screenplay for *Dominique*. Based on a selection of short stories by R. Chetwynd-Hayes, *The Monster Club* harked back to the omnibus films for which Amicus has become famous through the sixties and early seventies. Subotsky managed to get ITC interested in the project and through one of their subsidiary production companies, Chips Productions, a deal was struck and the film went into production immediately.

Ironically, Chips Productions had at the same time signed a deal to make a low budget sword and sorcery film, *Hawk the Slayer*, with Jack Palance and newcomer, John Terry, in the title role.

Subotsky successfully budgeted *The Monster Club* at under one million pounds and managed to pull together many of the crew from the Amicus days, including art director, Tony Curtis, editor, Peter Tanner, and veteran fantasy director, Roy Ward Baker. In the early stages of pre-production, Subotsky, who had produced several successful rock and roll films in the late fifties in New York, and *It's Trad, Dad!* and *Just for Fun* in England, decided to incorporate into the film several rock groups as well as some carefully selected classical pieces. With the likes of Vincent Price, John Carradine, Donald Pleasence, Stuart Whitman, Richard Johnson, Britt Ekland, Patrick Magee *et al*, and the massive

vs *Meanies*, and even *Thongor* in the *Valley of Demons*, which Subotsky is beginning to think of making as an animated cartoon, possibly in 3-D.

One can only hope that *Thongor* eventually happens for Milton Subotsky. If it is done as a live feature, it is likely that Cokliss would still be considered as director, despite the differences he had with the producer over the script. On the strength of Cokliss' success with his

fantasy oriented Children's Film Foundation features and his work on *The Empire Strikes Back*, he seems a logical choice to direct the epic fantasy.

As for Subotsky, he is as full of ideas as ever and at last seems to have found the ideal backers for his projects in ITC. After so many years of disappointments with *Thongor*, it almost seems that he has the right to make the film.

When I relayed to Subotsky the sug-



Above: Veteran horror stars, John Carradine and Vincent Price head the cast of the latest Milton Subotsky movie, *The Monster Club*. The premise is similar to the earlier horror anthologies produced by Subotsky for Amicus. Each segment is introduced by Price and Carradine. Below: Vampire hunter Donald Pleasence meets his end at the hands of his intended victim.



With the success of *The Monster Club* seemingly assured, ITC are very interested in producing several other Subotsky projects.

media interest raised by veteran publicist Lily Poyser, ITC became aware that they had a hot property on their hands and put the wheels in motion to promote the film with a series of merchandising items including games, puzzles, records, badges, posters, etc. A promotional comic book, drawn by John Bolton and written and published by ex-*Starburst* editor Dez Skinn for use within the industry, is already a hotly sought-after item by comic fans and the film, although not slated for release till March 1981, is already shaping up to be a cult favourite along the lines of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. It even has *Rocky Horror* favourite Fran Fullenwider in a guest part!

With the success of *The Monster Club* seemingly assured, ITC are very interested in producing several other Subotsky projects which include a film based on three stories from Stephen King's *Night Shift* anthology, a giant monster thriller, *King Crab*, a possible sequel to *The Monster Club*, *Monsters*

gestion from **Starburst** contributor, Richard Holliss, that he was another George Pal, with his love and understanding of the fantasy genre, he replied, "I really admired Pal. We do have a lot in common, especially our love of films of imagination. Another thing is that like Pal, I have the ideas and the know-how to make great fantasy films, but like Pal, too, I have the same problem of getting the money to bring them off".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Phil Edwards and Starburst magazine would like to extend their thanks to: Milton Subotsky/Sword and Sorcery Productions, Harley & Janet Cokliss, John Bolton, Lily Poyser and John Jay



Above: Thorong faces a fearsome winged spider. Below: Yet another horrible apparition to be faced by Thorong. These production paintings were executed by art director for Thorong in the Valley of the Demons, Tony Pratt.



This is a refreshingly intelligent satire on science and scientists, and a lot of other things besides, by Marshall Brickman, Woody Allen's collaborator on a number of movies.

It starts off with the amusing suggestion that somewhere in America there is a government think tank consisting of five eccentric scientists who are ignoring their original directives to solve the problems of the world and instead are putting all their creative efforts into crazy schemes that serve

The current interest in things extra-terrestrial prompts a government think-tank to try to convince the world that a real alien has already landed and is living among us, in the hope this will cause panic.

only to cause disruption and chaos. Among their many achievements is Legionnaire's Disease and a device that can control the Nielsen TV rating system — thus turning the Donny and Marie Osmond Show in to a smash hit when in reality only 400 people were watching it.

The current interest in things extra-terrestrial prompts them to try to convince the world that a real alien has already landed and is living among us, in the hope that this revelation will cause panic and social upheaval. The person they choose to be the alien is Simon Mendelssohn (Alan Arkin), a second rate psychology teacher with delusions of intellectual grandeur. After luring him to their remote establishment they use the beautiful Cynthia (Madeline Kahn) to dazzle him into submission and then give him an 80 hour session in a sensory

Above: After being submerged in a sensory deprivation tank for almost 200 hours, Alan Arkin is brought back to consciousness. Below left: Writer-director Marshall Brickman discusses a scene with Alan Arkin on the set of Simon. Below right: Alan Arkin and Judy Graubart hide out in a zany religious commune as they are hunted by the zanier scientists.

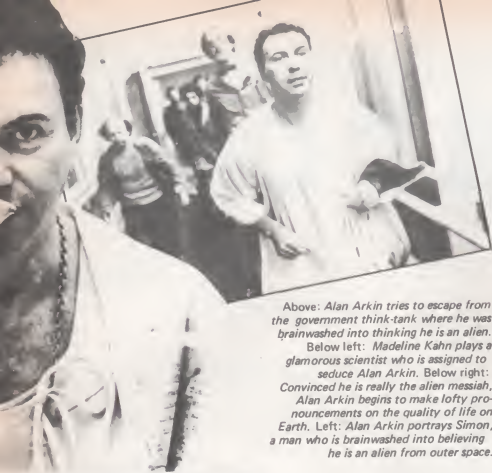
deprivation tank. He comes out with his brain completely washed clean, having been mentally regressed all the way back to a primeval amoeba.

From there it's a simple matter to convince him he's an alien and then present him to the world as such. However their plans go awry when Mendelssohn takes too eagerly to his role and decides that he is no less

A STARBURST FILM REVIEW

SIM





Above: Alan Arkin tries to escape from the government think-tank where he was brainwashed into thinking he is an alien.

Below left: Madeline Kahn plays a glamorous scientist who is assigned to seduce Alan Arkin. Below right: Convinced he is really the alien messiah, Alan Arkin begins to make lofty pronouncements on the quality of life on Earth. Left: Alan Arkin portrays Simon, a man who is brainwashed into believing he is an alien from outer space.

EW BY JOHN BROSNAH

ION

than an alien Messiah with all the answers to the world's problems. As his commandments grow increasingly bizarre, such as that all politicians must wear party hats, that no man should grow both side-burns and a moustache together because it looks silly, and that all canned music in elevators must be banned, the scientists realize they've created a Frankenstein monster, or

rather a Frankenstein loony.

The film's message is a simple one — that people shouldn't meddle in other people's lives, be they scientists or whatever. Even Mendelsohn finally comes to realize that to impose his personal preference and ideas onto the country at large is the worst kind of arrogance. He comes to accept that some people may actually *like* canned music in elevators.

The comic intention flags towards the end (there's a long sequence

The comic intention flags towards the end (there's a long sequence involving a space shuttle which is merely padding) but for his debut as a solo film-maker Brickman does pretty well.

involving a space shuttle that is merely padding) but for his debut as a solo film maker Brickman does pretty well. Naturally one can't help seeing elements of the Woody Allen movies in Simon but it's nearer in style to the earlier ones like *Sleeper* (which Brickman co-wrote) than *Annie Hall* or *Manhattan*.

In fact it's often a very much like watching a Woody Allen film without Woody Allen. In Allen's shoes is Alan Arkin who successfully brings his own comic persona, with its reliance on barely restrained hysteria, to the central character. The cast, over all, is quite strong, with Madeline Kahn, that fine comic actor Austin Pendleton, William Finley (who starred in the *Phantom of the Paradise*) and Fred Gwynne (from the *Munsters*). I doubt if Simon will prove as successful as any of the Woody Allen movies but it's a good effort and one hopes that Brickman gets the opportunity to try again.



A CAT AND MOUSE INTERVIEW WITH ROALD DAHL

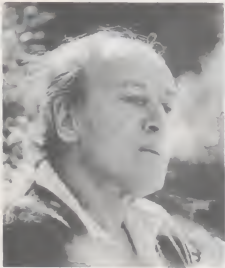
by Nicholas Leahy

The Oxford dictionary defines a troll as a supernatural being, a giant, or a friendly but mischievous dwarf from Scandinavian mythology. Meet the author Roald Dahl, and you may well prefer the definition of a mischievous giant. Six foot six, with wrinkled eyes, a bald, ostrich egg-shaped head, and a casual, sardonic voice, this is the man who writes the short stories that are the basis for the television series, *Tales of the Unexpected*. A selection of British and American theatrical talent have performed eight of his works, and after those eight more were screened . . . and now eight more. The series is such a success that the producer has now run out of Roald Dahl short stories to produce. Could he write eight more right away? No. The first lot took thirty years to write. In that time he has written short, sharp tales in which often pompous, difficult people have met their nemesis in a number of exotic and strikingly unpleasant ways. He has also vastly entertained children with his books, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Magic Finger*, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, *Fantastic Mr Fox*, and *Danny, The Champion of the World*. His books of

stories include *Someone Like You*, *Kiss Kiss* and *Switch Bitch*. He has recently published his first full-length adult novel called *My Uncle Oswald*, about a hero very close to his heart who discovers that the finest aphrodisiac known to man is a Sudanese beetle, and begins to cultivate them for profit. Perhaps a nauseating, refreshing film in time?

Meanwhile, on television, many of the actors who were in the first series returned to play victims and torturers in these little tales of revenge. Julie Harris, Elaine Stritch, Susan George, Joan Collins, and Jack Weston submitted themselves to more punishment. Sir John Mills, Gloria Grahame, John Alderton and Ron Moody had their first brush with this bizarre author. Roald Dahl has always had a literate poison pen for the unusual, as demonstrated in the kind of stories that were dramatized in the first series. In *Lamb to the Slaughter*, starring Susan George, a young wife murders her husband by clubbing him to death with a frozen leg of lamb. She then cooks it and serves it to the policemen who come to investigate, who unknowingly eat and dispose of the murder weapon. In *Dip in the Pool* Jack Weston played Mr Botibol, a venal tourist on an ocean liner, who

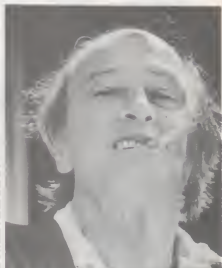
stakes all his money on the auction pool, where the passengers bet how far the ship will travel by noon the following day. Betting on low mileage, having heard a confidential bad weather report, the weather changes and he must find a way to slow the ship down. He throws himself overboard to provoke a time-consuming rescue operation, but no one notices and he drowns. In the second series this character returned in another story, as Roald Dahl has his favourites, and takes place before this sad event and is called *Mr Botibol's First Love*, which turns out to be . . . music. Sounds normal, but it couldn't be. In his children's stories, young and old alike meet unlikely fates. In perhaps the best-known, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Willie Wonka, the wizard-style sweet-maker has an awkward child pushed down a rubbish chute by some squirrels, who consider her a bad nut. Her equally awkward parents want to know where the chute goes. "Why, to the furnace, of course", replies Wonka. When the mother starts to scream, he says: "Don't worry, there's always a chance that they've decided not to light it today". When reading his books, you must try to care as little about the characters as the author does, as there is



"Every one says watch the eyes, it's all in the eyes, but I watch the mouth. The mouth says it all. It communicates everything."



"It's not a man's job to look in the mirror. Let the women do that all they want. That's not what a man's job is."



"I hate pompous people. Can't stand 'em. When I see them in their suits and bowlers with umbrellas, dreadful. I love to send them up."



Above: Author of the *Tales of the Unexpected* series, Roald Dahl, is caught in a fittingly eerie portrait.



Above: Michael Horden and Julie Harris appeared in the episode Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat.

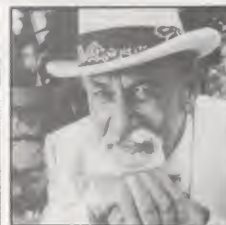


Above: Richard Greene, well-known as tv's Robin Hood, as he appeared in the story Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat.

no telling what may happen to them.

Dahl was born in South Wales in 1916, of Norwegian parents. After public school, he went on an expedition to explore Newfoundland, and then joined the Shell Company, working for them in Tanganyika. The Second World War arrived, and he joined The RAF as a fighter pilot, and served in Greece, Palestine, Libya and Syria. Wounded in the head, he was transferred to The British Embassy in 1942 as an air attaché. There he was wounded in the head in quite a different way. He became a writer. C.S. Forester, the author of the *Hornblower* books, had been asked by *The Saturday Evening Post* to interview anyone who had seen active service. He found the ex-pilot at the Embassy and took Dahl, then twenty-six, to lunch. Distracted by the meal, Forester found it hard to take notes, so Dahl said he would write something down for him that evening. He went home and wrote a short story called *A Piece of Cake*, an account of how he was shot down in The Libyan desert. Forester liked it so much that he gave it unaltered to his agent, and *The Saturday Evening Post* bought it for a thousand dollars, and asked for more. Roald Dahl had taken off on a different career. He wrote twelve short stories, all about flying, in America, which were later published as a book called *Over to You*. Since that meeting, he has never stopped writing. In that lucky moment, he found his life's work.

Mr Dahl's cave is a large, white farmhouse in a Buckinghamshire village, which he shares with his wife, the American actress Patricia Neal, plus one son and three daughters. There he is prepared to be an affable interviewee, who gives away as little about himself as possible. On the main door are two borrowed signs reading "Trespassers will be shot at first sight,



Above: Jose Ferrer starred in the title role of the first story in the series' first season: *The Man from the South*.

and if practicable, interviewed afterwards". And "Thieves Beware: Our poultry are marked and the marks registered". It is the same mordant humour as in the writing. Before, during and after becoming widely rich and famous, he and his family have suffered tragedy. His son was brain injured while still very young, a daughter died of measles at the age of five. His wife, shortly after winning an Oscar for best actress for her performance opposite Paul Newman in the film *Hud* in 1963, suffered a massive stroke from which she very painfully recovered. And he is crippled with arthritis.

Hard to find a sense of humour, after all that, of any complexion, black or white. This history makes introspection of any kind painful for him, so he confines intellectual activity, he freely admits, to the fantasy employed in the solitary process of writing. For living, he seeks escape in simple companionships, and the pleasures of his collection of paintings, fine wines and orchids. When



Above: In *The Man from the South*, Jose Ferrer offers Michael Ontkean his car in exchange for... a finger!

interviewed he will reliably divert attention away from himself. He speaks casually but precisely, although the sentences are terse. They are not wasted as they sometimes cost effort if he is in hidden pain. Their manner is public school circa 1930, replete with period slang like "good egg", and "smashing", punctuated by mild swearing. He does not sound innocent or ineffectual in their use. He was an unhappy child at Repton school, so it would be a mistake to think that he is an establishment product, however old-fashioned some of his attitudes undoubtedly are.

If anything is likely to rouse his contempt, it is people who appear to him to belong to any establishment. As he says, wearing a cardigan in his country kitchen.

"I hate pompous people. Can't stand 'em. When I see them in their suits and bowlers with umbrellas, dreadful. I love to send them up. I've got this thing about men with little beards and moustaches at the moment. It's vanity. You know what a mess they get into when they get colds,

they can't keep them clean. It's not a man's job to look in the mirror. Let women do that all they want. That's not what a man's job is".

What is a woman's job, I ask? "Whatever they can do, but they rarely do it as well as men". Arguing this point proves futile. He seems determined to see women in a romantic, restricted light. Would he give a woman an equal half share as an intellectual companion? "Yes, I would" he says. But as he subtly dominates the conversation, changing subjects smoothly and firmly immediately he loses interest, then this is a privilege rarely accorded even to a man.

Happily, at this stage he knows that I know what he is doing, as he smiles in passing the cheese to foil answering another question. But the man is revealed as he talks to a neighbour about their



Above: Susan George is comforted by Brian Blessed after the tragic death of her husband, who she coincidentally murdered!



Above: Jose Ferrer and his screen wife, Katy Jurado, in the *Tales of the Unexpected* story, Man from the South.



Above: Dame Wendy Hiller played an eccentric elderly lady who believed Franz Liszt had been reincarnated in the form of her pet cat.

Her husband (Joseph Cotten) was less than delighted at the hold the strange cat seemed to have over her, *Edward the Conqueror*.

mutual affliction, arthritis. His eyes cloud with bitterness at their plight, even while offering her genuine sympathy at the unfortunate bond between them.

"You've got a thin frame", he tells her, "so you'll just have to live with it. One day, you tell yourself that the pain is not going to go away, so you just think **** it. I see some old fellows hopping around the village, but they're lucky. I've had two hip operations and three back operations, although the last one wasn't too good, it ***** up. I've got a steel pin in each hip. I lie down between one and four every day to rest. You live with the pain, but it's very tiring, sometimes it comes over me"

The only visible signs are the arms stiffly held back, the stick for walking in the garden, and the occasional fatigue and impatience. He has a lot of time for

simple human distractions, such as sopping professional stories with a writer, or tales of country affairs with local people he knows well, who come to call. He responds well to their undemanding attention and cares for them.

He is very much a countryman, with his four dogs, a goat named "Alma" after the part Patricia played in *Hud*, his old, fashionless clothes, his battered briefcase, his estate car, and his rambling home and garden. When he writes, he goes to an old shed at the bottom of the garden, which is lined with plywood inside, even blocking up the window, and puts a baize green board on his lap as he sits in an armchair and picks up a pencil. A secretary comes in most mornings to type up the result.

It is strange to look at him in what must to him be a special place, so totally devoid of any comfort. All aesthetic reactions must be directed around his own mind as he works, without any aid from his environment, shut in as he is like



Above: Roald Dahl, author of the *Anglia* tv series *Tales of the Unexpected*, relaxes in his English country garden.



Above: Roland Culver and Julie Harris in the story entitled *The Way Up to Heaven*, the last segment of the first series.

that. "When I write, it flows", he says. "At the moment, I'm not working, so I feel restless. I'd like to get started again".

Any discussion about his work means reflection and attention upon himself, so he only says "It's just a joke. A good bit of fun". It is a lot more than that to have taken up so much of his life. He admits that it is an escape, that he seems to prefer not to understand. When he writes about people, he does not attempt to imagine to himself with their feelings, but confines himself to objective observations. "Everyone says watch the eyes, it's all in the eyes, but I watch the mouth. The mouth says it all. It communicates everything", he says: looking at me neutrally, as I try not to smile too broadly. "It shows lasciviousness".

This I take to be a general remark. He is proud of his reputation, and says, "What interests me is how I can do both, adult fiction and children's fiction. No one's ever done it before with this success. It's easy for me, one or the other. I'm interested in how I can do that. I can reach children. They haven't learnt to be civilised. I was telling a group of them in a school hall about a man who had a wife who wanted to be revenged on him, so she took a pile of worms and poured tomato sauce over them, and put cheese on top of them on toast, and served them to him as spaghetti. When they moved he said to her, 'This can't be spaghetti, it moved'. 'Well,' she said, 'It's a new kind', and she showed him the tin, called swishy spaghetti. So he ate them, and then she told him what it was, and the children shrieked. They loved it. They haven't learnt yet to be disgusted. They're still animals".

On the other hand he and they could just be into sadistic fantasies. He wouldn't think so. But whether you have repressed or ratified basic instincts, Roald Dahl will do his best to disturb them. He likes to shock people as regularly as



Above: Siobhan McKenna as the mysterious landlady of the best boarding house in town. But why does nobody stay there? The episode entitled *The Landlady*.



Above: Susan George is suitably distraught as she calls the police to her aid after the murder of her husband. What she omits to tell them is that she did the killing. *Lamb to the Slaughter*.



Above: Leonard Preston is more than a little perturbed to discover that the last tenants to stay in Siobhan McKenna's guest house

disappeared mysteriously more than two years before. What is the dark secret of *The Landlady*?



Above: Elaine Stritch is reunited with her husband, courtesy of Marius Goring, in the story, *William and Mary*.



Above: Jack Weston plays the bumbling Mr. Botibol on an ocean cruise in the story *A Dip in the Pool*.

possible.

What makes him angry, I ask? "Pomposity, and human incompetence, in a broad way". A fairly broad base for misanthropy. But he is affectionate to his kind of people, reticent about private displays of endurance and courage, and generous like a thoughtful child with food and toys that he has been able to buy as a famous adult.

Avuncular and autocratic, the shadows across his life are there in his work. Not personally stated, but transmuted into cruel games of fate upon the unsuspecting. "Life is cruel!" he says casually, but with more conviction than most, and he writes accordingly. As he led me up the garden path, a real one, to drive me back to the station, his tall figure led me into the dark... But I'll leave those stories to him.

COMIC HEROES

Comic book oriented projects are being announced by Hollywood film-makers with breath-taking rapidity. Alan Murdoch looks at this current trend and notes the idea is not so new.

It comes as no great surprise to hear that, at the time of writing, no less than fourteen movies based on various comic strips are currently in production.

After all, both films and comics rely completely on the interaction of words and sequential pictures to tell their stories.

But this mass migration of Hollywood producers to the four colour realms of the funny pages is hardly a new trend. Long before *Superman the Movie* was even a twinkle in a Salkind's eye, film-makers

were drawing heavily on the comics for source material.

The first comic character to reach the big screen was Windsor McKay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, who starred in a cartoon short in 1919.

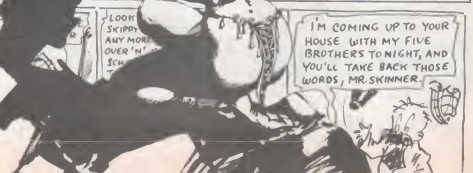
But audiences had to wait until 1927 for the first feature length film based on a comic strip. For it was in that year that Marion Davies, who later married Hearst of *Citizen Kane* fame, starred as Tillie the Toiler from the newspaper strip of the same name. The film, like the comic strip was unremarkable. The following year saw J. Farrell McDonald and Maggie Dressler appear in a feature version of McManus' *Bringing Up Father*.

This opened the floodgates and before the cinema-going public knew what had hit them, movies based on

comic strips and comic books were pouring out of Hollywood.

There was *Skippy* (1945, starring Jackie Cooper, who later appeared as Perry White in *Superman the Movie*), *Little Orphan Annie* (1932 with Mitzi Green and 1938 with Anne Gillis), *Joe Palooka* (1934 with Stu Erwin and a series between 1947 and 1951 with Joe Kirkwood). There was a series of *Blondie* films from 1938 to 1948, featuring Penny Singleton in the lead role. Then, in 1951, James Lyndon appeared in a movie version of the original comic strip soap-opera, *Gasoline Alley*.

Al Capp's *Lil Abner* was filmed twice in 1940 and 1959, the second time as a musical comedy. And between 1949 and 1951 *Jungle Jim*, by Alex Raymond the creator of *Flash Gordon*, appeared in the



ON THE SCREEN



Above: A daily strip featuring Alley Oop by Hamlin. The character is currently undergoing the Hollywood treatment. Below: A superb example of Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon, which should be coming our way as a film around Christmas 1981. Bottom: Fred Harman's Red Ryder turned up as a serial in the 1940s.



Prince Valiant

IN THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR
by Harold R. Foster



Our Story: PRINCE VALIANT THUNDERS INTO THE FRAY, AND ON EITHER SIDE RIDE HIS SQUIRES. CLAUDIUS FIGHTS GRIMLY ON THE LEFT FLANK WHILE ON HIS RIGHT GAY EDWIN SHOUTS JOYOUSLY.

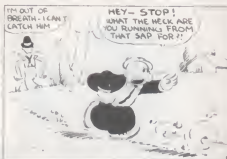
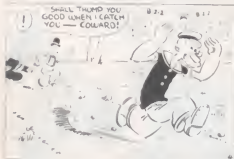


WITH RECKLESS COURAGE EDWIN SPURS INTO THE THICKEST OF THEIR ENEMIES, SO CARRIED AWAY BY THE BATTLE-LUST THAT HE FORGETS HIS ORDERS.



VAL SEES HIM GO DOWN AMID THE SAVAGE FOE. "TO THE RESCUE!" HE SHOUTS, AND HE AND CLAUDIUS SPUR FORWARD.

Above: Hal Foster's Prince Valiant formed the basis for an unsuccessful film version in 1951. Below: One of the most enduring cartoon characters of all, Popeye the Sailor.



Below: McManus' Bringing Up Father was one of the great comic strip of the 1940s. Two film versions were made.



cinemas with Johnny Weissmuller in the title role.

Another of the great adventure comic strip heroes, Prince Valiant by Tarzan artist Hal Foster was adapted to the screen in 1951, with little success.

More recently, we have been offered films of Modesty Blaise (1966, with which creator Peter O'Donnell was not pleased), Batman (1966), Barbarella (1967, based on the comic strip by Jean Claude Forest) and of course Ralph Bakshi's feature-length cartoon version of Robert Crumb's Fritz the Cat.

Then there were the serials. The film serials were a hot favourite of the Poverty

Row film producers between the twenties and the fifties. The serials were in fact just like comic books come to life, regardless of their sources.

There were around 36 sound serials featuring comic characters, running from 1934 (Tailspin Tommy with Maurice Murphy) to 1952 (Blackhawk with Kirk Alyn). And in the intervening twenty years serial fans thrilled to the exploits of Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Dick Tracy, Mandrake the Magician, Terry and the Pirates, Captain America, Batman, Superman and The Phantom.

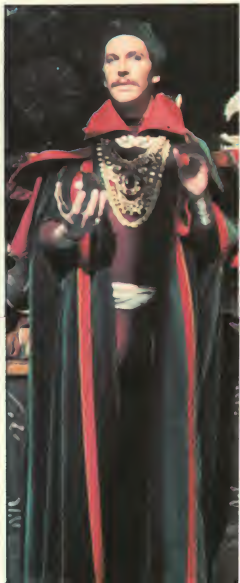
And now comes the news that besides the obvious comic oriented movies due

for the near future like Superman 2, Flash Gordon, and Popeye, we can also look forward to Conan (I'll believe it when I see it!), Alley Oop, Terry and the Pirates, Annie, Brenda Starr, The Silver Surfer, Dick Tracy, Sheena Queen of the Jungle (originally slated for Raquel Welch), Mandrake the Magician and (still very much in the planning stages) Batman.

So, although the idea of transferring the comic heroes to the big screen can hardly be considered an original idea, it certainly seems as though the comics are entering a renaissance period in terms of commercial interest.



Superheroes on the screen. Above left: The Amazing Spider-Man as portrayed by Nicholas Hammond. Above: Captain Marvel from the American tv series Shazam! as yet unseen in this country. Below left: Lou Ferrigno is The Incredible Hulk. Below: Peter Van Hooten as Dr Strange, which was aired recently on Anglia tv.





IT WAS AFTER the success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* that Walt Disney decided to give Mickey Mouse a comeback. With the introduction of new characters to oppose Mickey's popularity — Donald Duck, Goofy, et al — Disney felt he had a responsibility to the little mouse. After all, it had been all the hard work over the years with the early Mickey cartoons that had enabled the Disney studio to reach a peak of technical achievement with *Snow White*, in late 1937.

Disney felt that the format of the Silly Symphonies, a series of successful cartoon shorts made between 1928 and 1940, was an apt vehicle for Mickey Mouse. A piece of music that Disney particularly liked was *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, which told the story of a young magician tampering with his master's magic spells and creating all kinds of havoc. Disney felt that this, the ultimate Silly Symphony, needed a superlatively conducted, played and recorded musical score.

By chance, in 1938 at a Hollywood party, Walt Disney met Leopold Stokowski, who was resident conductor



A STARBURST BY RICHARD FANT



Top left: Ben Ali Gator and Hyacinth Hippo in the seasonal ballet with the falling leaves. Left: The Gipsy King accompanies the scenes of a savage Tyrannosaurus scene from the segment The Sorcerer's Apprentice.

FANTASY CLASSIC — HARD HOLLISS TASIA

greatest music!

WALT
DISNEY'S
Fantasia
with
LEO STOKOWSKI
Philadelphia Orchestra



EF



The Program

- TOOTATA AND TWOTIT IN D MINOR
Adrian Schwaninger Book
- THE NUTCRACKER SUITE
Peter Rabl Transcriptions
- THE BROOMS IN A WITCH'S
Paul Dukas
- RITE OF SPRING
Serge Prokofiev
- THE PASTORAL SYMPHONY
Leopold Stokowski
- DANCE OF THE HOURS
Antonio Vivaldi
- NIGHT ON BALD MOUNTAIN
Edvard Grieg
- AVE MARIA
Frédéric Schubert

from the Dance of the Hours segment of Fantasia, the Autumn Fairy releases the Milkweeds for their glorification of the Chosen One from The Rite of Spring. Coprus in a battle with a Stegosaurus. Right: A witch, featuring Mickey Mouse in the title role.



of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Stokowski expressed a wish to work with Disney. Disney knew immediately the conductor was a perfect choice to take charge of the musical end of the project. A delighted Stokowski rehearsed the music and recorded it while the studio went ahead with the animation.

But even with a small amount of pruning, the music would still carry the length of the short over the usual running time. Gradually, after great discussion, a decision was taken to broaden the concept to encompass other orchestral works. A series of "superior" Silly Symphonies. But the idea to present each piece as a separate short was abandoned.

Besides, here was another chance for the animators to tackle some really innovative animation techniques.

Deems Taylor, who was well-known to radio audiences for his programmes on classical music, joined the studio to act as a kind of liaison between Disney and Stokowski and, aided by the heads of the art and music departments, began to select the pieces of music required for the film. This task took three weeks. Though hundreds of orchestral works were considered, eight separate pieces were finally chosen. It is likely that Stokowski was the governing factor in the choice of music. After all, he was already well associated with two of the pieces. The



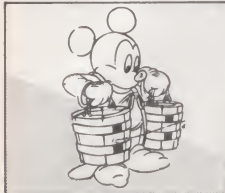
WALT DISNEY'S FANTASIA



TECHNICOLOR®

first was a special orchestral rendering by Stokowski from the original work, the *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* by Johann Sebastian Bach. The second, *Rite of Spring* by Ivor Stravinsky, had been widely performed by Stokowski in America.

All this time ideas grew about the presentation of the pieces and it was finally decided to release the music and animated sections together in one feature-length film. The title "Concert Programme" was adopted for the project, but the title "Fantasia", a musical term



meaning "freer development of a given theme" was preferred and, as nobody could improve on it, the name stuck.

In the spring of 1939, Leopold Stokowski began work at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, recording each orchestral section individually for a new form of sound reproduction — a pseudo-stereo called *Fantasound*. Thirty three microphones and some 42,000 feet of film were used during the recording sessions culminating in three programme tracks and one control track, although only 18,000 feet finished up in the final print. With the new Fantasound technique it was possible for technicians to move the sound backwards and forwards between the "stereo" channels, even to the extent of following characters across the screen.

So pleased was Disney with this new process, that he requested that Fantasia should be released in special theatres equipped with Fantasound equipment. The conversion took four days to complete and the speaker units had to be operated manually. Originally Disney had wanted the premiere theatres to be fitted out with special lighting and control centres, so the curtains could be opened and closed between each piece. The theatre personnel were to be hired and trained by Disney himself.

Unfortunately, the cost of installation, (approx 30,000 dollars per Fantasound unit) coupled with the growing shortage of electronic components due to defence needs, forced Disney to cancel his "special theatre" presentations.

RKO, the distributors, thought the film's two-hour running time too long for most cinema audiences on general release,

and requested that it be cut. Unable to face the prospect of editing a film he had poured so much creative talent into, Disney told RKO executives to find someone else to do it. As a result, the distributors excised the Deems Taylor/orchestral interludes, reducing the running time of the film from 120 to 81 minutes. The only complete print therefore appeared at the premiere on November 13th 1940.

As Fantasia had been conceived as a blend of music and visual images, it was decided that the opening credits would consist solely of a title card. The rest of the movie would be animated interpretations of the music interspersed with Deems Taylor's commentaries. During the Deems Taylor portions the orchestra could be seen in silhouette in the background. In the opening scene of Fantasia, Deems Taylor steps forward and welcomes the audience to the programme. He then introduces the opening segment, Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*.

Leopold Stokowski ascends the podium in silhouette with his back to the audience. He raises his arms and as the three major chords of Bach's famous work shatter the silence, colours emanate from off screen below him. For the entire length of the *Tocatta*, we are witness to reflections and colours depicting the different instruments of the orchestra. But at the commencement of the *Fugue*, the scene changes to full animation and the screen is filled with bows playing on floating strings, colour shapes whirling in space and thousands of luminous stars cascading through patterns of light. As the *Fugue* draws to a close, we move up



through the clouds to what at first appears to be the top of a giant organ. Then a bright orange sun rises on the horizon glowing brightly as clouds hurtle up both sides of the screen. Superimposed beneath this image the conductor re-appears, bringing to a climax Bach's greatest organ work.

Oscar Fischinger of the German Avant-garde school of animation travelled to the Disney studios personally to supervise filming of the *Tocatta and Fugue* and the whole section was directed by Samuel Armstrong, whose other credits include

Dumbo and Bambi. The only criticism that can possibly be levelled at this sequence is a failure to comprehend Disney's version of abstract design and maybe — more importantly — Stokowski's personal interpretation and re-scoring of the music.

As the orchestra tunes up for the next piece of music, Deems Taylor sets the scene. Introducing the *Nutcracker Suite* by Piotr Illich Tchaikovsky, Taylor points out that the Disney version will be very different to the original story. The audience having already been impressed



by the relation of music and experimental animation in the *Tocatta*, find themselves surprised by the complete change of style, the absolute realism of the paintings and images created to accompany the six sections of the *Suite*.

In the opening piece, *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, the Dewdrop fairies awake and as they dip in and out of the streams and pools they cover the early morning forest with glistening drops of dew. This is followed by Hop Low and his Mushrooms who perform *The Chinese Dance*, and this whole section, brilliantly animated by Art Babbitt is a delight.

We return to the stream for the *Dance of the Reed Flutes*, featuring the Blossom ballet and for the *Arabian Dance*, we go below the surface and witness through a forest of underwater flora, a water ballet performed by colourful fish with very long veil-like tails. A bubble rises to the screen, bursting into the *Russian Dance*. And as the scene freezes we find ourselves back in the forest glade. Autumn has come and for the *Waltz of the Flowers*, the Disney artists show us the arrival of the Autumn frost fairies and the intricate patterns of the falling snowflake fairies.

For the *Nutcracker Suite*, special cells (transparent sheets of celloid on which an animation drawing is inked and painted) with a rough texture were used. When coloured paints were applied to the surface, it gave the impression of pastel shadings. This effect was achieved because Disney had been impressed with the pastel storyboard sketches. (For the *Nutcracker*, director Samuel Armstrong had the storyboard sketches drawn on black backgrounds.) The finished sequence incorporated the use of the



Above: A scene from the Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (Pastoral) sequence, featuring Bacchus.

Multiplane Camera — a sort of 3 dimensional animation rostrum created by Ub Iwerks — which enabled all kinds of complex photography to be added.

The third piece of music is *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, the music that gave birth to the whole project. The sequence was directed by

silhouette of Mickey climbs the podium steps to shake hands with Stokowski. Disney was obviously proud to have his cartoon star appearing in person with the great conductor.

The fourth piece of music is Igor Stravinsky's controversial *Rite of Spring*. It is with this that Stokowski takes the

The story goes that Disney Enterprises wrote to Stravinsky requesting permission to use the *Rite of Spring* and offering 5000 dollars for the privilege. However, photographs available at the time suggesting Stravinsky helping with the re-scoring of the *Rite of Spring* were purely for publicity.

James Algar and Mickey Mouse was cast in the role of an apprentice who borrows his master's magic hat and conjures up a broom to fetch water to fill the Magician's indoor well. The little broom sets to work whilst Mickey relaxes, dreaming he is soaring up through the clouds creating magical waves and thunderstorms and commanding the stars and planets to dance for him.

Unfortunately, he awakens to find the broom has overfilled the well and the water is lapping around his feet. In his panic, he is unable to remember the spell to stop the broom, whose frenzied efforts to complete its task leave Mickey with only one course of action. He grabs an axe and chops it into hundreds of pieces. Believing he has freed himself of the curse, he wearily closes the door to the courtyard. Without warning each splinter bursts into a full size broom. Water flows from every window. Mickey swirls round and round on the Sorcerer's book of magic spells, trying to find a solution to the problem. Just as all seems lost, the Sorcerer appears at the top of the stairs. With a majestic sweep of his hands, he commands the chaos to cease. With a whack in the rear from the broom, the Sorcerer sends Mickey outside to begin his original task all over again.

At the conclusion of the music, a

most liberties. The end of the second movement is missing and the conclusion of the *Adoration of the Earth* is substituted. The story goes that Disney Enterprises wrote to Stravinsky requesting permission to use the *Rite of Spring* and offering 5000 dollars for the privilege. However, photographs available at the time suggesting Stravinsky helping Disney with the re-scoring of the *Rite of Spring* were purely for publicity, as an illness had prevented Stravinsky visiting the Disney studios until after the music was completed. Certain animators still maintain however, that the composer came to Hollywood, met Stokowski and Disney and was pleased with what they had done to his music.

The section opens with the creation of the Earth. We move up through millions of years in a matter of minutes, witnessing the single cells developing into the first fish. The following sequence is very well done, with the landscapes washed in browns, muted greens and yellows providing a very atmospheric background to the scenes of pterodactyls gliding from mountain-tops, Elasmosaurs moving through the primeval seas and finally the battle of two giant saurians, the ferocious flesh-eater Tyrannosaurus and plant-eater Stegosaurus, highlighted by a fierce thunderstorm. As the

prehistoric animals perish due to climatic changes, the world moves through yet another turbulent series of earthquakes, until all is peaceful again at the conclusion of the music.

Extensive research was undertaken to discover how the dinosaurs lived and moved, and even though scientific progress has uncovered some glaring faults in the *Rite of Spring* sequence, it still comes across as very informative and highly entertaining. (Prior to this film, the only other dinosaurs seen on the screen by a wide majority of cinemagoers were in films like Willis O'Brien's *The Lost World* 1925 and *King Kong* 1933.) The special animation effects were brilliantly handled by Joshua Meador who later created the Id monster in *Forbidden Planet*, and the sequence was directed by Bill Roberts and Paul Scatterfield.

After this brief intermission, Deems Taylor introduces the next piece of music, the highly-criticised *Sixth Symphony (Pastoral)* by Ludwig Van Beethoven. Originally, it was not the Beethoven piece that had been chosen for the idea of a country frolic, but story directors Joe Grant and Dick Heumer could not fit all the planned visuals to the music. So the *Pastoral* was chosen instead, though Stokowski was against the idea from the start.

The scene opens with sunrise over the valley and mountaintop. The main feature of the first movement being the family of flying horses and the closing shot, beautifully rendered in animation, with the Pegasus family landing on a great lake. Soaring above them, reflected in the water, are hundreds of other flying horses. At the commencement of the second movement, the scene changes with the arrival of the Centaurs to greet the Centaurettes. Although finally seen wearing flower garlands, the little Centaurettes

Below: The Demon appears in the N



originally had bare breasts. After strong complaints from the Hays Office Disney agreed to cover the exposed portions.

The final movements of the symphony are accompanied by a mass dance of all the characters in honour of the God of Wine, Bacchus, who arrives on the back of a small unicorn. (A small section of his arrival to his throne is cut from re-release prints.) As the celebration continues, Zeus appears out of the clouds and hurls thunderbolts at the gathering, producing some excellent storm effects, including the god of wind blowing in the time to the music. Eventually though, Zeus becomes tired. He tells Vulcan to cease creating the lightning bolts on his giant forge and then, pulling the clouds around him like blankets, fades away.

As the animals and mythical creatures come out of their shelters, we see the Goddess of the Rainbow, Apollo the sungod, and in a beautifully-animated finale, the god of night cover the land.

The next piece of music is *The Dance of the Hours* from the ballet *La Gioconda* by Paul Ponchielli. Directed by T. Hee and Norman Ferguson, both animation supervisors, it could be considered a perfect vehicle for a *Silly Symphony*. Creating a famous ballet scene and presenting the characters as animals works very well and is certainly humorous. The curator of the Dance Archives at the Museum of Modern Art applied to Walt Disney Productions for a print of the *Dance of the Hours* sequence for reference.

The special effects technicians create a fabulous finale with the *Night on Bald Mountain* by Modeste Moussorgsky, the last section in the programme. Under the direction of Wilfred Jackson, Joshua Meador and special effects cameramen Gail Papineau and Leonard Pickley present some startling scenes of demons

ht on Bald Mountain sequence.



Above: In the Dance of the Hours sequence, Madame Upanova is menaced by Ben Ali Gator.

and ghosts assembling on Bald Mountain at the invitation from the evil god Tchernabog. The scenario literally explodes with images of terror.

Stokowski again takes one or two liberties with *Night on Bald Mountain* in prolonging the opening and blending the end of the piece with the beginning of

programme in *Fantasia* as extra pieces were prepared. One piece of music, Debussy's *Claire de Lune* was already in the early stages on animation, but other projects, the intervention of war and studio politics prevented these ideas from becoming a reality.

Fantasia was not a success financially.

The use of the Multiplane camera for the trees sequence in the finale of the film is exceptionally well-executed, creating an unbelievable sense of depth and a multitude of planes. *Fantasia* ends as the curtains close. There are no end credits or titles.

Franz Schubert's *Ave Maria*. A six-minute finale to the entire film, depicting hooded pilgrims moving through a vast forest each holding a lighted torch. The forest gradually takes on the form of a cathedral, emphasising the power of good over evil, the sacred over the profane. Charles Henderson's choir sings the chorus to *Ave Maria*, with new lyrics written especially for the film by American novelist and poet Rachel Field. In one long zoom through the trees, soloist Julietta Novis sings the final verse and the camera moves up through the parting trees, to a beautifully animated landscape as the sunrises. The use of the Multiplane camera for the trees sequence is exceptionally well executed, creating an unbelievable sense of depth and a multitude of planes. *Fantasia* ends as the curtains close, there are no end titles.

Newspaper comments at the time of the film's original release were most flattering. Bosley Crowther in *The Times* deemed it "simply terrific". *Look Magazine* called it "a masterpiece" and proclaimed "Disney revolutionises movies again". Even Howard Barnes in the *Tribune*, although slightly skeptical at what the film was trying to do, called it "a courageous and distinguished production".

Disney hoped to re-arrange the

Pinochio had been released nine months before and it too had suffered at the box-office. Believed by many to be the most technically superior of the early animated features, it was a blow to Disney that *Fantasia* would suffer the same fate as *Pinochio*. *Fantasia* was re-issued in 1944, 1946, 1953, 1956 (in a weird superscope print that chopped off the top and bottom of the animated sections, to give them a wide-screen appearance) 1963, and 1969. In the early seventies, *Fantasia* received great praise indeed and acquired a big Hippy following, much to the disapproval of the Disney studios. The highly successful re-issue in London recently placed the film halfway up the list of ten best movies in the West End. A fitting tribute to a masterpiece of animation.

Fantasia (1940)

Story Direction by Joe Grant and Dick Heumer, Individual Sections Directed by Samuel Armstrong, James Algar, Bill Roberts & Paul Scatterfield, T. Hee & Norman Ferguson and Wilfred Jackson, Animated by Oscar Fischinger and Joshua Meador, Musical Director Edward H. Plumb, Music by Leopold Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra, Production Supervisor Ben Sharpsteen, Narrative Introductions by Deems Taylor, Produced by Walt Disney.

Time: 116 mins

Cert: U

"The list read like some arachnid employment agency —
 20 dummy spiders, on nylon lines so they'll twitch.
 6 puppet spiders, on strings.
 2 lightweight spiders, to throw at people.
 1 Queen spider, with working legs and mandibles.
 1 Great One, 60 feet across, (probably have to make this one a bit smaller!)
 oh and er... Boris.

In case you are wondering if I have gone completely mad, all this happened a long time ago, 6 years in fact, when we were preparing for the last time that Jon Pertwee would play Dr Who. The story in question was called *The Planet of the Spiders* and featured a group of large hypnotic spiders who were more than a little annoyed with the Doctor for pinching their special crystal.

Large as these spiders were, there was no way we could squeeze a Who monster-specialist-actor into a spider suit, so for a change, the lot of producing the guest villains for his particular story fell entirely on the Visual Effects Department.

The Effects Designer for this story was the co-founder of the department and then senior designer, Bernard Wilkie. Bernard's chief assistant was Ian Scoones and additional assistants were Richard Conway, Steve Bowman and myself.

Between us we constructed all the inhabitants of the City of Metabilis, the city itself and the numerous odd props and effects that stalk their way through any Dr Who story.

It was all some time ago, but I recall Ian vacuum-forming spider bodies over a mould for the dummy Council Members and building more pristine versions for the puppet spiders that would be used in the close-up shots. Steve spent a good deal of time turning out legs — 8 at a time — from a plaster mould. They were cast in thick latex and each had to have an armature wire fitted down the centre, to allow them to flex and stay flexed.

Richard spent most of his time building the Queen Spider. She had to be a real mechanical work of art and 15 bowden cables were built to work fore legs and mouth parts. Each cable travelled downwards to a 'keyboard' where the effects operator, usually, Ian, crouching under whatever podium the Queen happened to be sitting on, could operate the masterpiece. Baulking at building the Queen's boss, The Great One, with a potential 60 feet leg span, the Queen doubled up this role via colour separation overlay.

So far someone hasn't been mentioned...

At some point in the preparation period, Bernard decided that we lacked one particular type of spider. All we had

BORIS



Above: Mat Irvine tries to clean his car, aided and abetted by the now-infamous Boris the Spider, well known to both Who and Doctor Who fans alike. Above right: More of the same! Boris on display at a science fiction convention some years ago.



Below: The queen spider is positioned for a take during the recording of the Planet of the Spiders.



were tied to some external source, nylon, string or bowden cable. What we needed was a completely self-contained spider that would travel by himself with no apparent external control. So Boris was born.

He wasn't always called Boris, in fact all the other spiders were supposed to be female so I'm not sure how he came to change gender. I recall I was originally going to call him Buggy, but it didn't really fit. Then I remembered the old John Entwistle song and it seemed a perfect choice.

Boris arrived on the scene relatively late in the proceedings for I used one of the already vac-formed dummy spider bodies and a set of the rubber legs. It wasn't a case of building an ideal mechanism and making the body to fit, it was fitting what ever mechanics would go into the existing body.

The first task, apart from thinking the whole idea was madness, was to cut a plywood chassis to build a prototype mechanism. Ideally, I was thinking that I could get it all worked out as a prototype and then build a production version. However I should have known better for

Just who is Boris the Spider? What is his nefarious purpose? What does he plan to do after he's conquered the Universe? Special effects designer and sometime *Starburst* contributor Mat Irvine has now summoned up the courage to confess his connection with the Boris the Spider Affair, and reveals some of the secrets behind the mysterious clockwork arachnid.

THE SPIDER



Below: The other spiders seen in the Planet of the Spiders episode of Doctor Who were manipulated by an out-of-sight effects man — Ian Scoones being the chap who best fitted the bill. Wires and other control paraphernalia trailed all over the set.

this never works out in effects and the production version was never built.

A tricycle undercarriage seemed a practical proposition, with the back wheels being driven and the front wheel steering. A rummage down the Meccano drawer produced a number of sprocket wheels, odd lengths of chain and some gears. In addition a Meccano six-speed motor was found and the whole mechanical mess began to take shape.

The drive to the rear wheels was fairly straightforward with the motor being mounted between the rear wheels, offset to the right, the drive being through a pinion and crown wheel, via a sprocket system to the rear axle. The batteries (4 x AA size) sat in a custom made case over the drive chain. Right, Boris would travel, but how to get the legs to move authentically? I settled for just driving the middle four, hinging each like a rowing boat oar. Each pair had to operate exactly opposite each other, otherwise the whole lot developed a peculiar oscillation and tended to pull itself apart, which it later did anyway . . . several times!

This "rowing boat" approach even-



Below: The council chamber on the Planet of the Spiders, ruled over by the vast queen spider, who was reckoned to be 60-foot across.



tually worked very well, but the front and rear legs were too still. Eventually they were hinged to rock backwards and forwards and attached by elastic to the centre pulleys.

Consequently, once in action, all the legs were moving to some extent which greatly added to the horrific reality of it all.

Mind you, all this experimentation was too much for the poor old Meccano motor which eventually stripped a gear. The replacement did the same. I finally settled for a Monoperm Pile Motor instead.

The original vac-formed body did need some modifications as although the motor, batteries, steering and gears all fitted inside, the supports for the "rowing boat" parts would not. So a slightly modified vac-formed shape was made and held in place by a magnet which made for rapid disassembly in the case of an emergency (which occurred fairly regularly).

The ground clearance was very small, about 1/8th inch which was perfectly adequate for most shots on the studio floor, but Boris tended to grind to a halt when he encountered a carpet. Contrary to popular opinion he was not radio controlled, although there would possibly have just about been enough room for the additional equipment. To switch him on was straightforward, but switching him off was slightly more tricky. I remember having to do spectacular slides across the studio floor in an effort to reach his switch before Boris piled into the scenery wall and invariably tangled up all his legs.

Boris the Spider still survives to this day, as many people have seen at lectures and conventions and on television. He has managed to frighten Noel Edmonds on Swap Shop and he let me down in front of Bob Langley on Pebble Mill at One when his gear decided to slip. He is now on his fourth motor, although the third one lasted a good few years and he has had his ground clearance raised slightly. The drive pinion has also had to be replaced several times and he occasionally has a new coat of paint, otherwise he is exactly as he appeared six years ago, and that's not a bad age for a spider.

If you are wondering what became of the two legged members of the team, Bernard Wilkie retired early and now works mainly for German television. Richard Conway departed back to the film world and has worked on several recent films, including Arabian Adventure, and the remaining three are still with the Department.

And should you wish to hear Boris the Spider, the original version, you can find him on The Story of the Who. Polydor 3519020.

Regular TV Zone columnist Tise Vahimagi asks "If we can have *Twilight Zone* on British tv why can't we have *Journey to the Unknown*?"

With the House of Hammer tv series currently shooting at Elstree studios, which still has me wondering if it will all come out as phoney and flimsy as Roald Dahl's dismal *Tales of the Unexpected*, I got around to reflecting on Hammer's previous tv outing, *Journey to the Unknown*.

Whatever did happen to that excellent little series? Maybe it's buried somewhere under Down Place alongside Jimmy Sangster's old scripts? Who knows?

Considering the disgusting dross that being aired under the guise of fun and fantasy these days — one only needs to snatch a quick glimpse of *Space Academy* on Saturday mornings (LWT area, at least) to see how far down the sewage-system things can really go — why not a *rerun* of something with some real teeth 'n' claws? Something furry and ferocious like *Journey to the Unknown*. I mean, there may be "old" movies, but is there really *old* television? And if so, so what?

If reruns of *The Outer Limits*, *Star Trek* and *The Prisoner* (and I nearly forgot the indomitable *Dr Who*) proves that video-fantasy shows can still pull 'em in, why not re-introduce *Journey to the Unknown*?

Those poor suckers who, in recent years, have been reared on nothing more than the gimmickry of starchy stuff like *The Empire Strikes Back* and the theatrical, chop-down versions of *Buck Rogers* and *Battlestar Galactica* probably have no idea of what real, creative, spellbinding story-telling is all about. *Journey to the Unknown* is I realise, also, not exactly the Rolls Royce of mood-drenched drama, but what the hell! It's still damn fine television, whichever way you look at it.

The show's credits are bait for the imagination straight away: producer Anthony Hinds, exec producer Joan Harrison, writers Robert Bloch, Oscar Millard, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, directors Don Chaffey, Peter Sasdy, Robert Stevens, et cetera, et cetera.

One of the more memorable segments from *Journey to the Unknown*

as far as my likes are concerned, came in the powerful form of Robert Heverley's *Matakitas is Coming* — a *tour de force* of terror straight out of the Karloff Thriller series of some two decades ago. As Mr Hitchcock (*la la* his Psycho trailer) might have said of the segment: There's the girl. Researching a horrible, nasty old murder in a library. Then there's the time. The door locking. She's locked in for the night. Then there's that awful, shadowy "something" in the dark library with her. Could it be the Devil coming for a new sacrifice? Then there's Matakitas. He moves toward her out of the shadows. But I must not dwell on it.

Robert Bloch's *Indian Spirit Guide*, Oscar Millard's *One on a Desert Island* (as Hitchcockian as you can get on tv), Millard's *Paper Dolls*, Richard Matheson's *Girl of My Dreams* are a few that revive fond and frightening memories along with being superb examples of what creative television can do when harnessed under the anthology banner of a remarkable series such as *Journey to the Unknown*.

So how about it, you guys in the programming departments, let loose those seventeen segments of dreams and drama, fear and fantasy — journeys to the inner mind.

Having not yet seen one centimetre of footage from *Martian Chronicles* (at the time of this writing) I am led to believe, rather sadly, that the whole show may be the greatest misuse of electricity and celluloid since they decided to revive a series called *Return of the Saint*! How ever, I'm still holding out hope for this little gem of tele-se.

Having premiered on March 5th, this year, via American Vid-screen, *Beyond Westworld* is said to be a one-hour drama series about an army of indestructible humanoid robots attempting to take over the world. Humanoid robots?! I thought most of the actors in genre tv were humanoid robots! The two central characters in *Sapphire and Steel* are definitely not people, believable people. Or even aliens. Nor anything else. Most of the Doctor-from-the-TARDIS's pals-cum-assistants have had the effect of being humanoid. Certainly not human. However, before the entire Doctor Who fan club roster takes to writing vitriolic letters, I will say that not *all* the Doctor's pals came from the *Thunderbirds* acting school. However, a lot of the characters loitering around the background of Martin Landau's

flying moon in *Space: 1999* could not have been human. They must have been humanoid robots, direct from understudying the cast of *Fireball XL5*.

Maybe there's an English version of Central Casting that has a file on robot like 'actors' ready to spring into the first available sf/fantasy tv series? Come to think of it, aren't those quirky little tin characters from that mashed-potato tv ad already cult figures, with a feature movie scheduled for them? ●

NOTE: Mr Vahimagi has been given complete freedom by the Editor to express his opinions in any manner he chooses. Consequently, the views in this column do not necessarily reflect the editorial policies of Starburst magazine.

Below: A scene from the tv series *Journey to the Unknown*.



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BRIAN JOHNSON

JOHN BROSNIAN, AUTHOR OF THE EXCELLENT BOOK ON SPECIAL EFFECTS MOVIE MAGIC, TALKS TO THE EFFECTS SUPERVISOR ON *SPACE 1999*, *ALIEN* AND, OF COURSE, *THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK*, BRIAN JOHNSON.



Brian Johnson is currently Britain's most successful special effects man—after working on such movies as *Taste the Blood of Dracula*, *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*, *Revenge of the Pink Panther* and *Alien* (for which he won an Oscar), and the tv series *Thunderbirds* and *Space 1999*, he was selected from all the effects men available in both Hollywood and Britain to supervise the effects in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

We interviewed Brian Johnson back in *Starburst 9* but so much has happened to him since then we thought it would be a good idea to talk to him again and hear about his experiences working with George Lucas and Gary Kurtz on *Empire*.

First of all, is the Oscar you've won for *Alien* going to affect your career in any way?

"Well, my experience of special effects Oscar winners is that they win an Oscar and then they're usually out of work for a few months or a year because everyone thinks they've priced themselves out of the market, or think they've already been taken up by other companies, which isn't always the case. That's happened to a number of people that I know who've won Oscars. I'm already working on another picture so I don't think it's going to affect me.

"In fact just to be nominated was probably more of a thrill for me than actually winning it. But of course those few seconds after we heard we'd won were pretty exciting. Then, after a while, you realize that all the films that were nominated, *1941*, *Star Trek* and *Moonraker*, had got very good special

effects in them—and they've all got *not* so-good effects—so to me the nomination was probably more important than getting the Oscar. I mean I thought that *1941*, was going to get it, and if *1941*, didn't then *Star Trek* would. I sat back just before it was announced and said to my wife, 'A.D Flowers is bound to get it for *1941*, because his effects were just stupendous'."

Isn't it a situation where a lot of people, even ones in the film industry, don't realize just how many effects shots there were in *1941*?

"That's right, yes. They were so good in *1941* I think the audience thought half of them were real whereas in *Alien* they know it has to be special effects because they know the creatures don't exist. In *1941* I thought some of the Hollywood Boulevard stuff with the 'planes flying down it were just superb. Terrific!

"But the whole Oscar thing this time was a bit strange. As I understand it the special effects are voted upon for enhancing the production value of the movie and the people who are nominated for that category are nominated by the producer of the movie. Well, the funny thing was that for *Alien* H.R. Giger got nominated for an effects Oscar and yet he was responsible for the production design—he did all the visual concepts for the movie—it was his sketches that the sets were based on, and Ron Cobb's as well. I mean, why Giger got an effects nomination and Ron Cobb didn't I don't know, but I have the feeling some sort of political thing went on there because Giger wasn't involved with the effects..."

And yet now he's got an Oscar for

special effects?

"Yeah, it's crazy. The thing that usually happens is that the head of the effects team is put on the nomination thing first and H.R. Giger is down as head of effects in *Alien*. It doesn't really matter that much because he'll find his little niche in the film industry, just like a lot of other people, though I doubt if he'll ever be directly involved with special effects."

Moving on to *The Empire Strikes Back*, at what point were you involved with its development?

"Well, right at the beginning, before the script was ready, I was engaged to do the effects. Then I travelled to California and saw George and Gary. At that time Industrial Light and Magic was no longer in existence, it had been split up after *Star Wars* had finished. Various pieces of equipment that had been obtained by George and Gary were being transported north to a new building which wasn't yet completed. As the building was completed it was decided roughly how it was going to be structured inside

and which rooms were going to be for which pieces of equipment and so on, then various people were engaged to get things like the optical printer designed and built. . . .

"At the same time Ralph McQuarrie was doing conceptual sketches from the script of various items, like the Walkers and Cloud City. Cloud City was actually going to be in *Star Wars* but had been taken out so we already had designs for that. And then Joe Johnston did the storyboard incorporating Ralph's designs with his own and by then the production was gradually building up momentum. We were having discussions about how we were going to do various effects shots and which areas would be left vague. And we engaged people like Phil Tippett and Jon Berg for the stop-motion animation and started them off building the Walkers—Phil and Jon had done the chess game in the first film. In the end we had about 90 people working at ILM up in San Francisco."

Your blue screen work is generally

superior to previous work using this process. Why is that?

"Because we use different methods of actually generating the blue backgrounds. They're honed up, revised versions of techniques that have been used before. There's very little real innovation that comes into effect these days. It's all been done before but we now have lenses that are of a better quality and we have film emulsions which are much faster—all those sort of things contribute to the overall quality. But our optical printer was one of the key factors, it pushed the state of the art into new frontiers. It was the responsibility of Richard Edlund and a number of optical designers. It's unique . . . it cost about £400,000."

If you wanted to set up a British equivalent of Industrial Light and Magic how much would it cost?

"Oh, about three or four million pounds. We'd have to buy certain pieces of equipment from America, like some of the lenses. And for all the equipment at

Left: *The Imperial probe droid scans the surface of Hoth for life forms.* Below: *The Millennium Falcon is pursued through an asteroid belt by Imperial TIE Fighters.* Below inset: *Luke Skywalker recovers in a special capsule filled with a "healing fluid" after his encounter with a native of Hoth.*





Above: *Han Solo* (Harrison Ford) arrives in the cloud city of *Bespin* and met by old friend, *Lando Calrissian*. The extreme background of this scene is achieved via a matt painting superimposed over the real background.

ILM you can really do only one picture at a time so you need *more* than one ILM. But if you invest that kind of money there's no way you're going to get it back because it's not a profitable business. George Lucas runs the whole of ILM basically as a loss leader simply because if he doesn't have ILM he won't be able to make a picture like *Empire*. The trouble over here in Britain is that if people

"There's no question that the money Lucas made on *Star Wars* went into making *Empire*."

invest money in things they want to see a quick return on their investment, which is understandable. But George doesn't worry about that. I wish I was another George Lucas because if I'd made the amount of money that he has on his movies I'd do exactly what he does—plough it back into the industry. There's no question that the money George made on *Star Wars* went into making

Empire, the establishing of ILM and helping other people to make movies too. He's invested an incredible amount of money and he's helped a lot of people who are outside his initial sphere of activity."

Lucas, Kurtz and the others are really part of a new breed of Hollywood film maker, aren't they? Working with them must be more satisfying than working with the more traditional type of producer.

"Yes, because they're *movie* makers in every sense of the word. In some areas—how can I put it—because they're concerned about getting the movie out, they leave certain things rather vague. But at the same time they have a tremendous interface between the individuals concerned. Lucas, Kurtz, Coppola—they all talk to each other a hell of a lot and discuss things. Working with them is satisfying because they're not bothered with the ego thing. Obviously everybody has their own ideas about how they want to make movies and the director of the movie

influences how the movie is to be made in conjunction with the producer. George likes producing movies and is not so keen on directing yet his direction is pretty good and his editing is stupendous. He's a complete film maker in my eyes..."

How did you get along with Lucas personally? Is he as shy as people say?

"He's very shy. He's had some bad

"Lucas is very shy. I found him very intelligent, very well-read and extremely shy."

press which I think is very unjustified. I found him *very* intelligent, *very* well-read and extremely shy. But as you get to know him the shyness gets less and less and you get to see more of the real George Lucas. But I don't think anyone, apart from his wife, really knows or understands him 100 per cent and why should they?

"He's very generous. One gets invited

to dinner when you're working over there but the thing is not to overdo it because you're aware of the fact that he's a very busy person. But his wife and my wife and a load of other people formed a softball team called the Sprockettes and we played a lot of Sunday afternoon matches and George used to come and cheer us on. Great fun. He's the All-American boy, he likes hamburgers and the whole American way of life. And the way he lives is great fun. . . ."

"We story-boarded every effects shot we had to do and George made a definitive cut."

How involved was he with the effects in *Empire*?

"A great deal. His main interest is in editing and as every editor knows if you haven't got the right bits of film to put together then you're in trouble. So consequently we story-boarded every effects shot we had to do and George made a definitive cut with all the live action that had been shot together with animated drawings of the planned effects shots. We'd made these ani-

mated drawings—called 'animatics'—to go between the live action. They were really just simple line drawings put on an animation bench and very crudely animated just to give a feeling of what the shot would be like. And in that way we knew what sort of frame length we had to aim for when shooting each effects shot. Because when you're animating something like the Walkers, where it takes hours to produce a few seconds of footage, it can be a hard thing to judge.

"So yes, George had a great influence. We were allowed the freedom of saying to him, 'Do you want to see this or that or the other in this shot?' Then we'd talk about it, discuss the various possibilities and make a decision on how we were going to shoot it. Then we'd do it and George would come along and say, 'Yeah, that's great,' or 'No, I don't like it.' And if he said the latter we'd sit down and analyse the shot, we'd rock and roll it and see what he didn't like and then restructure it. Sometimes it just meant changing the synch of when a spacecraft came in and out of things, other times it meant reshooting, but on the whole we didn't do a great deal of reshooting. The thing is when you've got a number of talented people together there's a

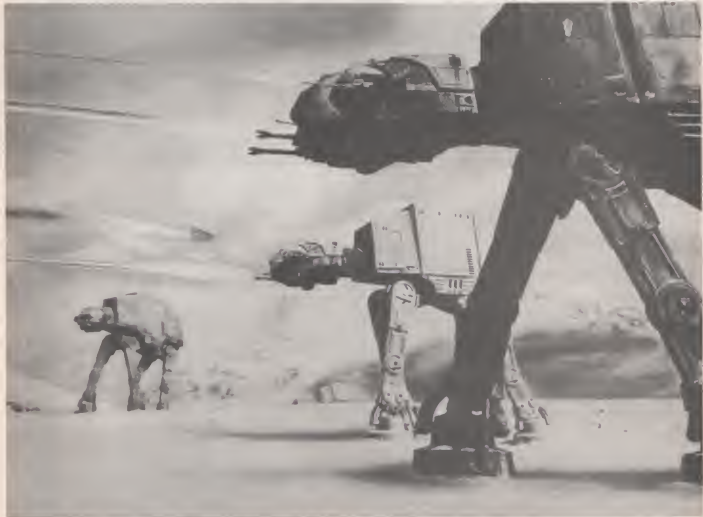
number of different ways of doing things so you've got to have someone saying, 'This is the way to do it, this is what I want.' You need a captain."

What were the most difficult effects shots in *Empire*?

"The snow battle sequence, I'd say, and tying together some of the animated Taun-taun stuff with the original live action. We tailored it shot by shot. I actually went through every reel of location footage and selected the back-

"The snow battle sequences were the most difficult effects shots in *The Empire Strikes Back*."

ground plates to go with the animation to try and match from one scene to another. I did a rough selection and George made the final selection out of the ones that I gave him. Then we said, Okay, this is the background that the Taun-tauns run through—are we going to use the original plates or are we going to build a three-dimensional set that matches it exactly and put the animated figure in the middle of it and hide the armatures and control mechanisms?



Above: The Imperial Walkers advance upon the Rebel Alliance base on Hoth. Johnson says that these scenes were the most demanding effects shots of the entire film.

And I'm not going to say which scene uses which method but we did it in a number of ways. Some shots were done against blue screen and some were done a three-dimensional set."

How difficult were the full-size Taun-taus to operate?

"Very difficult because it was cold and everything froze solid. In fact the only shots of the full-size animals that worked were the close-ups. Most of the other ones didn't get into the movie because they didn't really work..."

Were many of the effects shots cut out from the final print?

"It wasn't a question of not including them but the movie was recut to some extent fairly late on and George trimmed some of the shots just to speed up the action. In the end we ended up doing 430 effects shots and some were eliminated because they were something of an overkill. One thing you don't want to do is overdo the number of effects, you want just the right amount to tell the story without swamping everything by having effects just for the sake of having them. I think that's what happened with *Star Trek*—there were lots of shots in that movie which weren't really necessary. That's the great thing about George Lucas—he's a movie maker and a story-teller and it shows in his movies."

**"We used the same sort of
Harryhausen techniques plus
motion control."**

Was the Norway location the worst you've ever worked on?

"I enjoyed it but then I wasn't there for the full six weeks. We came back and carried on with the live action shooting at EMI-Elstree but my crew was there for the full time and got frost-bitten. I think for them it was probably the toughest they'd ever been on. They were 6000 feet up a glacier and were always short of breath apart from freezing."

How big were the Imperial Walkers?

"Well, they ranged in size from little tiny ones for the long shots that were about four feet tall. And we built a full-size section of one for the sequence where Mark, who was doubled by a stunt man, goes up on the wire and tosses the bomb inside."

Is ILM's method of model animation quicker than Ray Harryhausen's?

"Well, each shot of the Walker wasn't very long so it was only a matter of hours per shot but I wouldn't say it was any quicker than Ray's. We use the same sort of Harryhausen techniques plus motion control. Sometimes, because of the latter, our shots took longer to line up than his. Altogether it took quite a few months to get all that stuff done..."

How big was Darth Vader's ship? The detail on it looked incredible.

"The Star Destroyer? Well, actually it



Above: The spaceship *Nostromo* upon the windswept surface of the strange planet in *Alien*.

was smaller than the Imperial Cruisers, the white ones. They were actually bigger than the blue ship—the biggest one was about 8 feet long—but it was the way we put the shots together. Vader's ship just looked bigger. It was about 7 feet long and proportionately it was much finer than the cruisers. It had a lot of fine detail on it which took over 6 weeks to apply."

Did you have any of the original models from *Star Wars*?

"Yes, we had the original 4 foot Imperial Cruiser and the 4 foot Millennium Falcon. This time we made a 2-foot Falcon so that we could get more manoeuvrable shots with it. And we made a little tiny Falcon about 2 inches across for when it was on the back of the Cruiser."

What about *Dragonslayer*? You're shooting the live action here and then it's back to California for the effects?

"Yes. The latter will involve some of the live action sets with blue screen motion control work in California—the animation of the dragon and stuff like that. We're basically using a selected crew from the ILM configuration—and we have a honed down team of top guys all giving us their best and I'll be going over there to supervise it when I'm finished here."

Will there be much model animation?

"There's something like 50 dragon shots and there are other model things to shoot as well."

I notice you're working with full-scale sections of the dragon over here. Do you agree with Harryhausen that they're always difficult to work with because of the lack of control?

"Yes, I do agree. We're using them as little as possible. For instance, we might

shoot through the dragon's legs so that means a foot might come into the frame then you cut to something else. We're using a head and a neck that are seen briefly, and a wing, and the tail. But it's just like shooting around an aeroplane—you shoot *past* it to see the action or whatever. But these sections have to be well made and, mechanically, I think we're in good shape. We've got a different way of operating them so that they should be smoother and more animal-like. It's usually the movement that gives these things away every time..."

How big is the budget on *Dragon-slayer*?

"Not as big as *Empire's*. It's around the 13 million dollar mark. That *used* to be a big budget but no longer. It'll be aimed at *Empire*-type audiences, I think. It's certainly not going to a typical Disney picture. It's a Paramount/Disney co-production and I believe it's aimed more at the Paramount sector than at the Disney sector of the audience. There's no intention of it being a 'Disney-type' movie—it's got some pretty hard-hitting things that go on in it. It's very explicit. Not *Alien*-like but we have the benefit of that sort of experience to help on this production. It'll be released in Summer 1981."

What are your future ambitions? Do you intend staying in the U.K. or will you be moving to America?

"I don't know. I'm getting very keen on making my own movies now. I'd like to do it here but if somebody in America makes an offer than I'd probably go there. I'll go wherever the opportunity presents itself. One has to take the offers that come along..."

Brian Johnson, thank you.



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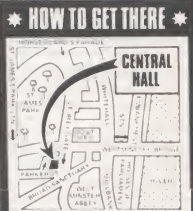
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BOOK WORLD

It's a pleasure this month to lead off with a book which I can recommend wholeheartedly. The author is Gregory Benford, whose previous work includes the Nebula Award winning *If the Stars are Gods* (in collaboration with Gordon Eklund) and the well-received *In the Ocean of Night*; the novel is called *Timescape* (Gollancz, £6.95).

Benford is unusual – not to say unusual – in being both a respected science fiction writer, and a practising scientist of some eminence (full Professor of Physics at the University of California at a very early age). Of course, there have been scientists who have dabbled in sf (Fred Hoyle being the most eminent), and many sf writers have had scientific careers (Isaac Asimov, to name but a few), but nobody has previously pursued these twin careers with Benford's success. In *Timescape*, for the first time, he draws significantly on his scientific background, and the result is a massive advance over any of his previous work.

So what's it about? It's set in 1998, in a world which is sliding swiftly towards catastrophe – resources running out, pollution out of control, civilization on the verge of disintegration. In the middle of this, two scientists at

Alfred Bester's stories were exciting, colourful, restlessly experimental and lots of fun.

Cambridge University are experimenting with tachyons – theoretical particles which travel faster than the speed of light, and therefore according to Einstein's theories move backwards in time. They embark upon a desperate scheme to broadcast messages to the past warning of the terrible world they are living in, in the hope that action can be taken to prevent that world from ever coming into existence. That's one half of the story. The other part is set in 1962, in California, and deals with the efforts of a young scientist to interpret these mysterious signals which apparently come from space (the Earth is constantly moving, and by 1998 is a long way from its position in 1962), and then to convince his colleagues of their importance.

Okay, stories in which people travel back and change the past are a traditional staple of science fiction, as are stories of time paradoxes (what happens to you if you go back in time and shoot one of your ancestors?). Previous to *Timescape*, however, they have been no more than enjoyable fantasies – nobody believed it might be possible. Benford's novel, though, is soundly based on advanced modern physics (he is an acknowledged expert on tachyons), and if there is any cheating in the science it is on far too sophisticated a level for the ordinary reader to catch him out. His discussion of the theoretical problems posed by time paradoxes – and the solution he offers – are a revelation.



This month, regular *Book World* contributor John Bowles takes a critical look at the new book from Gregory Benford, *Timescape*, plus the latest offering from Alfred Bester and a new illustrated hardback from Pierrot.

Left: Author Gregory Benford, whose new book, *Timescape*, comes highly recommended by Book World columnist, John Bowles. Below: The wraparound cover for the latest effort from Malcolm Edwards, in collaboration with Robert Holdstock – *Tour of the Universe* (Pierrot).



In case I seem to be recommending a book of advanced physics thinly disguised as fiction, let me hasten to assure you that it isn't like that. I've no patience with sf novels which use their pages as a kind of blackboard to drum a little scientific education into dim readers' heads. *Timescape* is a genuine novel, in which the theoretical discussion flows naturally from an immensely convincing, and exciting, portrayal of scientists at work. Admittedly there are no space battles here, no mad scientists, no evil aliens – but if you've ever enjoyed Arthur C. Clarke's books, for instance, this is a novel you should on no account miss.

On the other hand you could, without too much pain, give a miss to Alfred Bester's latest, *Golem 100* (Sidgwick and Jackson, £6.95), much as it hurts me to say so. Bester was the man who, in the 1950s, seemed miles ahead of his contemporaries in his grasp of what sf might achieve. His stories were exciting, colourful, restlessly experimental and lots of fun. Then he more-or-less stopped writing fiction for over a decade. Since he restarted, his stories have been colourful, desperately experimental and not much fun at all. Bester's reputation seems to be such a millstone around his own neck that he can no longer relax and let his instinct and talent dictate what he writes. *Golem 100*, his long-awaited supposed masterpiece, shows this all too clearly. It's tricked out with illustrations, dialogue presented in the form of a

musical score, and exhibitionist prose. But beneath the gaudy tricks (and the ghostly self-indulgent dialogue) lies very little. It's about a group of ladies who play around at summoning the devil. They don't do so, of course, but what they do call up is a creature – the Golem of the title – which amalgamates their subconscious compulsions and goes around creating mayhem. Science fiction movie fans will quickly realize that what we have here is nothing more than Forbidden Planet's Monster from the Id, and in a rather less absorbing story.

On the lighter side, the latest of Pierrot's line of sf illustrated books is *Tour of the Universe* (£7.95) by Malcolm Edwards and Robert Holdstock. The story, which is not terribly important, concerns a young couple who win the holiday of a lifetime – in the 26th century – a package tour of the galaxy. What the book attempts to do is to bring their adventure busting into life with a mass of original colour illustrations by the likes of Jim Burns, Tony Roberts and others, together with facsimiles of documents, cuttings, forms and so forth, cutaway illustrations of spaceships, extracts from books of the future, and so on. The result is a book crammed with detail – and, incidentally, an amazing feat of design and layout. Unlike many of the recent illustrated books, it certainly isn't something you can exhaust with ten minutes' browsing in a bookshop.

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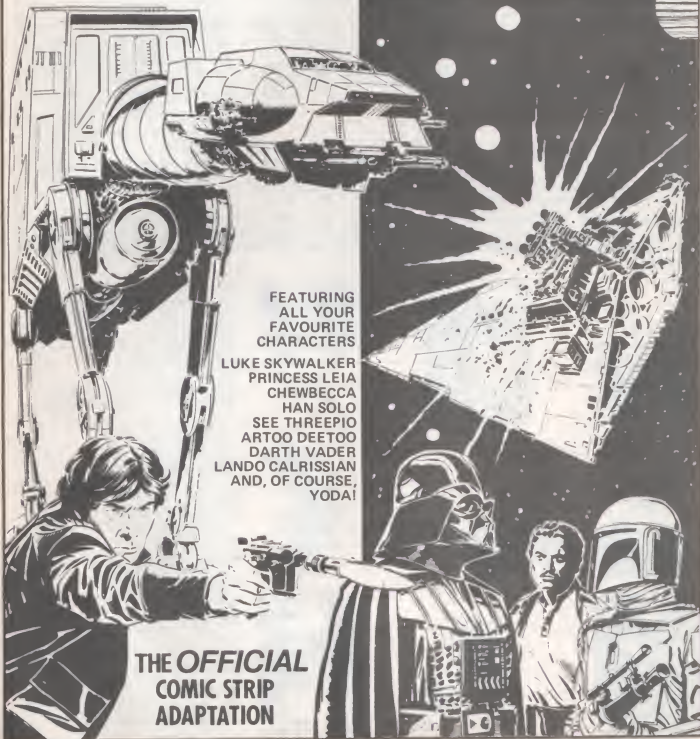
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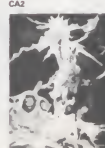
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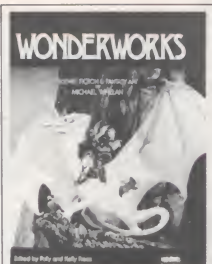
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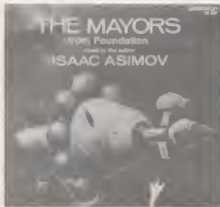
This month we present a special guest *Record World* on collecting fantasy records by Ken Howes.

Amidst the proliferation of sf and fantasy merchandise which has exploded onto the market during the recent commercial successes within the genre, a usurper has stolen onto the scene, virtually unannounced, ready to launch its assault on the established media. The sf record is making its challenge, and while its popularity has not yet reached the stage of "discomania", co-existence with the paperback, the magazine and the comic book appears to have been assured.

No longer just an idea or a tentative experiment the sf record is now a popular form—or alternative—depending on your point of view. One disc, Harlan Ellison's energetic reworking of his own immensely popular *Repent! Harlequin* story, has been nominated for the prestigious Hugo award. In many ways this represents a meteoric rise to respectability for a relatively young medium, but suffice it to say that this indicates a phase of consolidation and a solid basis for a full frontal assault on a commercially intoxicated audience.

Following the success of his first album Ellison is quick to point out the potentialities within the field. "Listening to records," he says, "means that you have to use your head—you have to envision and dream things for yourself. It's like reading a book; it's a participatory action."

It is possible, then, that sf records may soon join the long line of collectibles cherished by a compulsively motivated fandom. For the potential collector there are obviously two priority considerations. Where to start and what to avoid. The choice of sf and fantasy-orientated albums is now pretty diverse although this spectrum may be broken down into the major categories of soundtrack, spoken-word and original compositions.



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Read by the
author
ARTHUR
C. CLARKE

The final chapters •
Original theme music

Film scores, for so long the mainstay of the field, remain the most popular selection, thanks to the compositions of John Williams and other contemporary talents. Williams' excellent scores for *Superman*, *Star Wars* and *Empire Strikes Back* have cemented their position at the top of the collectable league.

One interesting development has been in the spoken word category, where well-known authors read from their best-loved works with varying degrees of dramatic aptitude. Unlike soundtracks these discs do not appear on the racks of your local friendly record dealer although Caedmon Records, with a more than interesting selection of readings, have a British agent. An American-based company, Caedmon have recruited such notables as Leonard Nimoy and William Shatner to read *Foundation: The Psychohistorians* by Asimov, Bradbury's *Illustrated Man*, Heinlein's *The Green Hills of Earth* and *Mimsy Were the Borogoves* which is arguably Henry Kuttner's most popular short story. The best performance from this duo comes on Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (reviewed along with *Foundation* in *Starburst* 4). Some authors prefer to read their own work and Caedmon have selected some blockbusters here. Arthur Clarke's diction is a little indistinct in parts of *2001*, but without spoiling it and Theodore Sturgeon performs *Baby is Three* from the respected novel *More Than*

Human with some gusto. Fairly recent additions to the catalogue are *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *Gwilt's Harp* from Ursula Leguin and the second *Foundation* volume on which the good Doctor Asimov's accent can be compared to that of a Brooklyn cab-driver.

There are a few specialist items on the Caedmon list with two Lovecraft recordings to cater for the "weird" fans and a trio of Kurt Vonnegut albums if you prefer your science fiction a little more mainstream.

Pure fantasy, an integral part of the field but so often neglected, is often harder to find than big





brother sf but Caedmon have come to the rescue with an interesting "Arthurian Legend" record of American author Howard Pyle's *The Sword in the Anvil*. Ian Richardson, a Royal Shakespearean actor reads with style and the whole package is elegantly skilful. British fantasy is also well represented with Tolkien's fabulous *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The first book, *The Fellowship of the Ring* is coupled with the vastly popular *Hobbit* whilst the other two books in the series are contained on a companion disc. *Poems and Songs of Middle Earth* completes a fine trilogy of recordings.

The Sword of Shannara, the subject of a rigorous promotional campaign recently, is another of Caedmon's fantasy offerings but, unfortunately, the reading of author Terry Brooks, in glorious monotone, is far from inspiring.

Although specialist sf and fantasy bookshops stock many of these records the best way to find out about them is by contacting Caedmon's British agents at Teakfield Ltd, 1 Westmead, Farnborough, Hampshire, GU14 7RU.

The aural medium is by no means confined to film scores and readings, however, although their resurgence with current popularity trends has encouraged new projects and has engendered a spin-off area in which experimentation is currently taking place. The most exciting development so far has been the Maiden Records release of three albums that re-create the magic of the old radio serials now sadly departed. Each disc contains two mini-dramas, varying widely in plot, which attempt to shanghai the reader into dream worlds that include some unspeakable horrors (see *Record World*, Starburst 9). These records would make a welcome addition to any collection and, indeed, would be a good place to start. With quality sound effects and competent acting plus two colour covers per album there is every possibility that this line will expand and hopefully blossom into a whole sub-genre. This will have the affect of broadening the scope of the entire field whilst serving as an introduction to younger listeners and potential converts to the fantasy persuasion.

The advance of sound technology into the field of radiophysics prompted the BBC Radiophonic

Workshop to try their luck with a few original recordings. Dr Who fans might like their selection of sound effects from various episodes but the casual listener might not. Any deficiencies in the radiophonic line are counterbalanced by the BBC's quite outstanding *Space Themes* album. All the top space programmes are represented here with introductory music from such notables as *Star Trek* and *Blake's 7* among others.

The evolutionary chain of the record world would not be complete without a little contemporary music and one good example is *Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of The War of the Worlds*. Combining narrative with rock music this two-record album leans toward the instrumental with interesting vocal numbers from David Essex, Julie Covington and others. Ambitious in scope but capably assembled the attempt to present a classic story in the modern idiom is richly successful.

If you know a good specialist dealer comic fans can get into the scene also. A series of comic book and record sets, singles or long players, have appeared on the market so that you can listen to your favourite hero and read about him at the same time. *Batman*, *Superman*, *The Hulk* and *Spiderman* represent the traditional costumed heroes, while *Star Trak*, *Space 1999* and the *Six Million Dollar Man* cross over from the visual medium.

One other major consideration of course, that applies to any sphere of collecting, is the cost. Prices vary considerably depending on the content and presentation of the disc. Caedmon's offerings retail at £3.95, cassettes a little more expensive at £4.75, while the Maiden dramas are good value at £3.99 each with a reduction if you buy the set of three. Film soundtracks often come as a double album, with *Superman*, for instance, selling at £6.99; the packaging, though, is superb with a colour centrefold sleeve and fine miniature reproductions of film stills on the inner protective covers. As a rule of thumb prices should not deviate too much from those quoted, although the odd specialist item may stretch the purse-strings.

Whether or not the sf record confirms its viability with a sustained period of growth remains to be seen. Interesting possibilities for dramatic presentation stretch to the horizon and it would appear that the greatest potential will emerge in this direction. A great wealth of musical talent on both sides of the Atlantic will undoubtedly keep soundtracks well to the fore.

The growing pains of the infant medium are decreasing and anticipation grows as the field approaches the difficult adolescent period. The indications are that the science fiction record will mature and join the family as an established little brother.





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ALL PAYMENTS TO "HARLEQUIN"

A STARBURST INTERVIEW

GLEN LARSON

Part Two

A recent addition to the wondrous thrills of the Universal Studio Tour - the No 1 tourist attraction in Hollywood, full of behind-the-scenes activities of a film studio, including Hitchcock's Psycho house, Jaws leaping out at you in your GlamorTrain bus, a flash flood, a parting of something like the Red Sea, a glacial avalanche, and a runaway old Western train heading straight for your busful of screaming tourists - is a splendid laser-beam Battle of Galactica.

There you are, peacefully riding around the lot in the bus, clicking Instantmatics by the second, when an UFO blocks your path. Laser cannons fire right at you, and the GlamorTrain is ordered inside the craft, which immediately prepares for take-off - until rescue is at hand and the battle ensues in a myriad of 25-watt laser devices firing at 1600 impulses per second. Or so I'm told.

I never went on the Tour, being too busily ensnared in Glen Larson's office. I'm not even sure if Larson has been on the Galactica trip. Or even if he knows about it. At the pace he works, I rather doubt he leaves his pair of offices in the Black Tower edifices.

On the other hand, he must have an inking



Above: Producer Glen Larson. Below: The Universal Studios Tour Bus nears the entrance of the Cylon Mother Ship.

Interview by Tony Crawley

of the tourists' stunt. For quite suddenly, out of the blue funk that is US tv network planning, ABC-TV asked him to resurrect their exed Battlestar Galactica show in a new format. The result of the first film version around the world must have had something to do with this change of heart - and so must the laser-popping attraction on the Universal Tour. Not much use having all that relatively free Galactica publicity laid on by Universal daily - visitors have long passed the 25,000,000 mark - if there's no show for them to watch back home on the box.

Whatever the thinking Galactica is back. With - apart from Lorne Greene's Cmdr Adams - all new faces. Starbuck and Apollo, Boxey and Col Tigh, and even the beautiful Athena (Meren Jensen to us, who Dino De Laurentiis promptly picked up for his son-of-Hurricane film, Sea Killer) has disappeared into the galaxies.

Of course, we've not even seen Battlestar Galactica in time-warping Britain, yet; the movies, yes; the series, no. It's still around on some shelf someplace - Granada-TV in Golden Square, no doubt - awaiting a British ITV networking time. (September 4th was the last date we heard. And Buck Rogers is due on August 30th. But by the time this issue reaches you these dates will have been and gone—Editor.)

Once we do meet the crew of the good ship Galactica in its varying fights with the dastardly Cylons, we'll find it as difficult, no doubt, as



the Americans to tune in fully to the 74,000 dollar show. With all the survivors from previous onslaughts also on board, it had too many characters for audience-identification Blake's 7 were better drawn, and I might say, better acted. Not difficult. Veterans like Green or Jim Garner apart, acting in American TV series is exceedingly slipshod. One-take stuff, too often because of time.

The new Galacticans are trimmed in number. Starbuck and Apollo are replaced by Troy and Dillon. For Maren Jensen, read lovely Robyn Douglass. Lorne Greene is now in a Santa Claus beard. And the uncouth Boxey (Noah Hathaway) is superseded by the real scene-stealer of the new series as far as the Americans are concerned . . . No, not a robot spin-off of Boxey's Daggit, or even Buck

Rogers' Twiki, but a teenage superbrain, Dr Z, by name. He's played by 15-year-old sf fan, Robbie Rist. And I gather it won't be long, if he has his way, before Robbie is writing a few episodes himself. He's *thar* keen on sf and idolizes Larson.

The special effects are carried out by Universal's Hartland facility and with less than a rush for their services as before — although Larson admits the show itself was typically rushed into being. For the one major difference between Galactica old and new is that the 1980 series deals much more with Earth. The Cylons are never far away, of course, but the colonial Battlerstar Galactica is more intent on returning to Earth, or investigating what may be left of it, picking up the pieces, and starting life anew there . . . if that's feasible, and if the Cylons

will allow it. There is, in fact, despite the youthful kiddy-Spook appeal of Robbie Rist, a touch or two of the old Star Trek in the new series. Time, alone, of course, will tell.

Glen Larson, certainly, is pleased with the way it's going, very keen on his new troupe, and the show's potential. Although, as he makes clear in this concluding part of our meeting in Hollywood, he is *not* obsessed with science fiction. However, he does have at least one more of fantasy up his sleeve . . . He is, inevitably and noticeably guarded about it, yet as he has a way of pulling off most of his deals in US-TV, I rather doubt it'll be long before they're making room on the Universal Studio Tour layout for another slice of Larson magic to shake the tourists up in their Paramount GlamorTrain buses.

Starburst: Battlerstar Galactica had been made, more or less, in a hand-to-mouth fashion. You vowed not to do that again — "not to spend another year in the trenches." But you say you violated that rule . . .

Glen Larson. . . when ABC came back to us and said, "Maybe we made a mistake".

Must be great having such a multi-million-dollar network coming back, cap in hand, admitting past errors. But since ABC axed the first series, had you planned a Galactica revival?

We had made plans for what we would do. First of all, we had to create something of an event to rekindle interest . . . And the idea of Galactica discovering Earth presented something that, at the very least, we felt we could get a good sample of what we wanted to do . . . and had to do. So we had a good movie.

Strictly a television-movie this time.

I wrote a two-hour script for them. Actually, I think I wrote about an hour. They read that and said, "We really do like this, we wanna take a shot with this".

"The new team is excellent. I would loved to have been able to have started with these guys."

So we expanded it, and long-winded as I am, it wound up as a three-hour movie. Then, of course, I didn't expect them to come back and say, Let's put it on this season! We were aiming for next season.

You were being rushed again, just as with the original Galactica.

Exactly! Once again we were in the trenches. No time at all.

Despite the rush — on this show and, no doubt, your 'five or six others — Galactica 1980 is on the air and thriving. You kept Lorne Greene from Battlerstar, but everyone else is new. Do you regret losing Dirk Benedict, Richard Hatch, Maren Jensen . . . Apollo, Starbuck, Athena, Tigh, Boxey and all.

It's a generation later . . . It came about from a combination of things. We worked to assemble the identical team. Then, there was a question of whether to keep



Above: An example of the original comic strip of Buck Rogers in the 25th Century as drawn by Rick Yager. Opposite: Two scenes from the Buck Rogers television show.

anyone from the first series. The order for episodes from ABC came so quickly, some of the actors were busy, some were not. We kept Lorne as a kind of continuity factor. But I think that the team that is doing the show now — Kent McCord, Barry Van Dyke, Robyn Douglass, young Robbie Rist — is excellent. In terms of getting into the characters, in terms of being able to bring a warmth to the screen, I would love to

have been able to have started with these guys. They're terrific. Dick Van Dyke's son is one of them by the way — Barry Van Dyke, our Dillon, is Dick's son.

What about the kid, Robbie Rist, as the ship's genius. He's this year's Noah Hathaway-plus . . . He's so important, you're obviously gearing the new show to the kids.

There is a certain amount of gearing for them, that's incumbent on the 7 o'clock

time-slot. At the same time we don't ignore some very sophisticated levels to the show. So I think it plays on two levels. There is some enrichment for the children in using a character like Robbie's Dr Z, a genius at 15 — but I'm sure he has as much adult appeal as for the kids.

As we know from BJ and the Bear and all your previous shows, you're not wholly committed to sf. What's your background in the genre? What did you grow up on? My big interest was radio. I fell in love with radio as a young boy. Someone invited me to a broadcast. And when I saw those people standing on a stage —

anybody in the business) and go in and see Jack Benny and Rochester, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. I just fell in love with broadcasting. It so entranced me, I used to collect scripts.

The rest of us who grew up on radio did so with our ears only — but you were seeing these guys. No wonder you went in for something visual like tv...

But before going to the shows, I'd grown up with all the radio serials. I listened avidly. But I guess it was the linking of the two that did it for me. There was a certain implicit to seeing it — much more complex just hearing it. When you

and gave Kool-Aid and things to the kids who came to see the shows.

And obviously some of the radio shows dealt with science fiction and fantasy.

There were two. They didn't turn my world upside down, but I liked them. One was, I think, called Dimension X, the other 2,000 Plus. They were anthologies. They did some of the stories by Heinlein and Bradbury, and other classic science fiction works. Then, I saw the movies... Rocket Ship X-M, Destination Moon, a few of those things. I was most impressed with War of the Worlds — pretty spectacular in its effects. The Day the Earth Stood Still was another wonderful picture.

Again in proportion, I wasn't obsessed with science fiction. I'm not obsessed with it now. I'm hawoked by it! I'm just (laugh) totally decimated by it! It's an intrusion in my life, because with all the necessary effects and everything... oh boy, you can produce four other shows in the time you do one Galactica episode or a Buck...!

Earlier, you gave me the impression that your teams were dropping like flies from the overtime to fulfill the continually rushed network orders.

I wasn't just talking about my people. I'm talking about the people in the industry. I don't have a lot of time to talk to other guys like Dave Gerber or Norman Lear or the Mary Tyler Moore organisation. But I have friends in a lot of these units — Dave is a friend — and just see the manner in which all our shows are cancelled or moved around from slot to slot, day to day. I mean, my Sheriff Lobo is going to be in three different time-slots over the next three weeks. It's chaotic! Move this one up, push this one back, finish this one in a week, do this, do that... In the

"I was most impressed with War of the Worlds — pretty spectacular in its effects."

history of theatre, nothing has ever been done in that way. Talent is an important ingredient in success, but there's another T involved — and that's time. You need a little moment to reflect on everything.

Is it, therefore, absolutely impossible for any important tv producer like yourself, to quietly work for a couple of years on an idea, a format, shoot your own pilot secretly, or without any network breathing down your neck, put everything you want into it — the best effects, for example — give yourself all the valuable time you require to make a great show, and then show it off to a network. Is that impossible in the crazy American tv structure?

It's not impossible. But it is unrealistic. When you're doing that, you're really making a movie-movie — to put it in your



what is now, I guess, Home Savings and Loan, which was then the NBC Building on the corner of Sunset and Vine — it had a mystical effect on me. All these people talking into these little, square, RCA 44, oddly-shaped microphones. The Buster Brown Gang, Smiling Ed McConnell and right after that, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello had a children's show next door. I used to go down and stand in the no-ticket line (because I didn't know

see it, you see a guy standing there going... [he imitates the horses' hooves effect by thumping hands on chest] and that's The Lone Ranger! I mean, you go crazy. And you think, wait a minute...

I started putting on little radio plays in our garage at about ten or eleven. I made fake mikes out of clay. We did all the sound effects. There was one Flibber McGee and Molly script I typed out, one finger at a time and handed them out...

terms which you've learned since you've been here! You're making a movie-movie which a television person can accept as an entity that was not turned down by the other networks, because it started as something else. But in television, you have something called 'the pride of authorship' with network people. When you walk in cold off the street to the development people, or those in the buying position, with something new — there's a kind of hands-off attitude. They feel it must have been shot someplace else

"I grew up on radio and put on radio plays in my garage at about ten. I made fake mikes out of clay."

... But if you've developed the show with them, if they've seen it grow from the beginning, and they've been able to push it towards the direction where they are more secure, they feel far more comfortable in putting it on the air.

They feel it's their show, not yours, they're backing themselves?

Pride of authorship... I So you either do it that way, or you come in with an absolutely hot hand, just so hot they'll take a shot at anything you say... But that does not happen very often. And

also, if even if you did shoot it exactly the way you wanted it, they say: Now that we've bought it — let's change it! *And all to win a better rating.*

Sure. They're putting shows on, pulling shows off, buying movies — fourth run movies — all kinds of things. The very people that do this are doing the same thing to their lives as they're doing to ours... I won't paraphrase the ethnic slur, but it's like the country that developed an atomic hand-grenade that blows up over a radius of a mile — but of course, you can only throw it 50 ft! That's pretty much what we're into here. Television is a very effective hand weapon.

So switch to movie-movies, why not? And plans in the cinema area?

We're working on some things, but I can't free myself from this bondage. There's a line from Fiddler on the Roof that says it all: It's no disgrace to be poor but it's no great honour either... I adore what I do. I really enjoy it. It's really a great joy to drive on the lot and play with these toys, to see things come to life which you'd conjured up on the back porch or while driving along in your car, thinking, "Gee, wouldn't it be great if we did this". But there's a time when you wanna say, "Enough's enough!"

Until then, knowing the odds and the peculiarities of television and the audience's taste, you have to keep the pump primed. It's dangerous to walk away from it and say you'd had your fill. I want to do something else. I believe in trying to pursue a movie career at the same time as doing this. We have five hours a week on prime-time to fill right now — my own unit. And that's somewhat unique. We're not a lot of people and it doesn't leave a lot of time.

Is there one sf subject — or book — you'd

"All the networks are preparing for diabolical slaughter to wind up with that half-point win — and an awful lot of people are suffering."

like to turn into a movie-movie... or even a tele-movie?

Oh yes. At the moment, I have a kind of a science fantasy project that I wanna do. But it's my own.

I'm not surprised...

Well, it's a unique idea. It's... bizarre! I'm sure I'm going to get laughed out of town or... everyone will want it. It's so unique, that someone will say, Let's do that.

But you're not saying any more. In television, the walls have ears!

One of my all-time favourite shows and I almost consider it science fiction for some reason — because it has that reality

"I'm not obsessed with science fiction. I'm just totally decimated by it. You can produce four other shows in the time it takes to do one *Galactica*."

base to it — was Dr Strangelove. That's a classic piece of film-making. And of course, I didn't discover the guy Kubrick, did I? But still, there's something about that movie... Even *Galactica* has that reality base to it, even though it's in another place and dimension. Buck Rogers is much more fantasy. I like things that I think people can still identify with... even though they're set someplace else or they're set here about a different kind of people.

You mean TV-network people?

(Laugh).

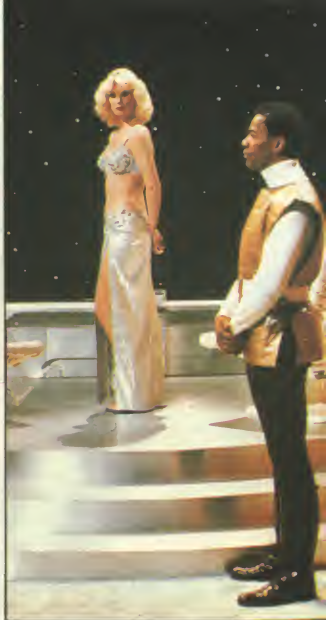
Finally, what do you envy about British television?

I must say, I've very little exposure to it; except as an American I have to be impressed that we keep bringing over variations on British television shows which are highly successful here. They're all breakthrough shows, which suggests that the British aren't afraid to be a little more resourceful and innovating and, I would say, sophisticated in their approach to reality. They seem to have less... ah... restrictions than we do.

And less money!



Above: A scene from *Mission Galactica* The Cylon Attack. *Thames Television* have announced that they plan to screen the first of the *Battlestar* series on September 4th. And *London Weekend* are to show the first *Buck Rogers* episode on August 30th. Both announcements came too late for *Starburst* to give suitable advance warning!



Above: Disaster! A scene of death and destruction on the bridge of the *Battlestar Galactica*, from the television series produced by Glen Larson. Right: The Buck Rogers tv show has (an more than its fair share of lovely ladies. Below: Fire aboard the *Galactica*! A team of fire fighters struggles to control a blaze in the *Battlestar Galactica* tv series.



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